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ABSTRACT

This document presents findings from the first stage of an Australian study examining how adolescents are affected when their parents divorce. The participants in the study were adolescents in 41 intact and 37 divorced families. Part 1 of the document contains eight chapters on the results of a series of quantitative analyses. Chapter 1 reviews the literature and outlines the study rationale; chapter 2 describes sample characteristics; and chapter 3 outlines the methodology. Chapter 4 compares the adjustment scores of adolescents from divorcing and intact families, reporting no differences between groups. Chapter 5 examines happiness, conflict, and parent-child relationships in both groups. Chapter 6 examines divorcing families only. Chapter 7 reports no measurable differences between the developmental levels of the adolescents from divorced families and those from intact families. Chapter 8 describes an independent measure of adolescent adjustment and maturity based on parents' appraisal of their children. In part 2 of the report, qualitative evidence is presented to illustrate and interpret statistical findings. Chapters 9 and 10 present case histories and chapter 11 draws together themes from the interview material, relating them to statistical results. In part 3, chapter 12 summarizes the results and suggests ways in which the findings may be used by parents and policymakers. Thirty-eight tables/figures and 93 references are provided. The appendixes include tabular research results and the adolescents' and parents' interview forms. (NB)

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'Don't feel the world is caving in'

Adolescents in divorcing families

Rosemary Dunlop and Ailsa Burns

CG 021013

Australian Institute of Family Studies

'Don't feel the world is caving in'

Adolescents in divorcing families

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FOREWORD

Divorce has been permitted in some form or another in most societies, religions and cultures. It is a necessary safety valve for the inevitable volatility of intimate and formalised human relationships.

But its social acceptability and the social consequences which flow from divorce have varied widely, particularly for children. Some cultures assume that, on divorce, children will remain the 'property' of the father and his kin, or the maternal kin; other cultures, including our own, base decisions about children more on principles of child-rearing or the rights and best interests of children than on kinship-related parental rights.

Since the 'whole child' must be cared for, it is difficult to divide up responsibility between parents or between parents and some other authority such as the State. Yet responsibilities are 'divided' on divorce, and social questions about both consequences and relative responsibilities loom large. Often forgotten in this discussion is that responsibility for children is usually divided within marriage too, and the conflicts which affect children when parents separate may be no worse than those that precede the split.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies was concerned from the outset to clarify what was happening to children involved in separation and divorce. We had read the literature from overseas research and had found much of it wanting. The standard assertions about children from 'broken homes', about psychological maladjustment, socially disruptive behaviour, and long-term effects on later life stability were based on a normative framework which was rapidly becoming obsolete. Stigma and trauma may hurt children when they are one of the few, but have less power to hurt when many of their friends have had similar experiences. Even in the face of high divorce rates in the United States and several European countries, research persisted to frame its questions along 'social problems' lines and to compare 'family types' without properly analysing the family processes or other factors such as income, poverty, neighbourhood quality and so on that might better explain the differences observed.

As well, much previous research on the effect of divorce on children has

been flawed by including children only from 'broken homes', with no control group of children from intact families. There have often also been clinical samples of those children experiencing severe emotional disturbance, so that no really meaningful statements could be made about whether divorce or parental separation as such actually caused higher levels of trauma, psychological maladjustment, delinquency, and poor school performance.

The Institute determined that its research of this issue would have proper controls to produce more reliable (Australian-based) findings than much overseas research. The Institute was also concerned that the study should include in-depth interviewing to reveal the quality of adolescents' experiences of divorce. This study combines these essential elements to good effect, focusing on two groups — intact and separated — and looking closely at family processes as well as structure.

The same approach characterises other Institute studies on divorce effects. Another study contracted at the same time as this one has been published as AIFS Working Paper No.11 (1987) '*Implications of Marital Separation for Young Children*', by G.W. Smiley, E. Chamberlain and L.I. Dalgleish. Findings from the Institute's major study comparing family effects on children has recently been published as *Children in Australian Families: The Growth of Competence*, by P. Amato (Prentice-Hall, 1987).

The study reported on here arose from the Institute's first contracted research, advertised in late 1980. The aim was to provide, through substudies, more detailed, qualitative information on the divorce process than the Institute was able to obtain from its *Australian Family Re-formation Project*, — a large sample survey of divorced adults. Applications were assessed and possible contractors interviewed by a team of Institute staff.

'*Don't feel the world is caving in*' developed out of a proposal submitted by Ms Rosemary Dunlop and Dr Ailsa Burns for a pilot study on a sample of adolescents in intact, separated/divorced and conflicted families, who would be followed up in subsequent years. Discussions with the Institute led to some modifications of the original design but the essential elements of having a control group and a longitudinal element were seen as highly desirable.

A contract for $16000 was made in April 1981 and work commenced under the supervision of an Institute Steering Committee, headed by Dr Gay Ochiltree. Macquarie University contributed vital back-up support for the research.

Progress was slow initially because of difficulty in obtaining a sample. Careful groundwork had to be laid by the researchers to approach intact families through New South Wales schools, and divorced families through the Family Court (Sydney). Extension of the divorced sample size to allow for a wider variety of family circumstances meant an additional grant of $4043 in May 1982. A total of 37 divorced families and 41 intact families was interviewed. A great deal of assistance was provided by the Family Court (Sydney) for which the Institute is very grateful.

Findings from the first stage of the study are reported here. The second stage follow-up was funded separately by the Institute in March 1984 and work is proceeding.

Perhaps the most striking feature of all the Institute's studies on the effects of divorce on children is the consistency of the findings, despite different samples and different research methodologies. They all confirm that it is the degree of conflict, not divorce per se, that traumatises children; that most children are resilient and adapt well provided parents handle the situation sensibly; that poverty as a result of divorce has more damaging and lasting effects than the fact of divorce. Each study supports our earlier view that factors lying deeper than the surface characteristics of family types explain how children react, a view now also confirmed by recent overseas research.

The results indicate how important it is for parents, teachers, judges and other authorities not to label children, not to generalise about all children from 'broken homes', not to assume the effects are always bad or to assume that children do not still see 'their family' as intact. Quite clearly the effects vary by age, sex and other circumstances. The findings point to a need for parental guidance and support in minimising the effects of conflict on children or the tendency for children to blame themselves for the separation. The need for children to be cared for by both parents not torn in different directions and the need (indeed the obligation) for continued joint parental responsibility and maintenance is apparent.

The Institute's research in this area has built on what is contained in this report and we await the follow-up findings with interest. Our overall framework is that of 'parental responsibility' and our work involves the cost of children, social security and service supports, and the legal status of children. Institute research staff are now following up our samples from the *Children in Families Project* and the *Economic Consequences of Marriage Breakdown Study*. The latter focuses in particular on how custody, access and maintenance arrangements change and affect the wellbeing of children and parents in the years following the divorce. The former will give a clearer picture of how life-chances and decision-making are affected for youth whose family circumstances have changed since the first interviews.

Controversy surrounding children and divorce will doubtless continue, but we hope reports such as this will help Australians better understand the nature of the problem and handle it more effectively.

We thank Rosemary Dunlop and Ailsa Burns for their enlightening account of how separation/divorce affects adolescents and their families. We also thank Macquarie University for its support for this project. We are keenly aware of the contribution made by the adolescents and their families in this survey and thank them for it. After the delay to publication caused by budget cuts in 1985–86, the Australian Institute of Family Studies is pleased to publish this book with the assistance of a grant from the Victoria Law Foundation.

Don Edgar
Director Australian Institute of Family Studies

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Rosemary Dunlop is a senior tutor in Psychology in the School of Behavioural Sciences at Macquarie University. Her teaching and research interests lie in the areas of personality, the family and developmental psychology. Publications and papers include 'The child in the divorcing family', in Burns, Bottomley and Jools (eds) *The Family in the Modern World*, and a number of conference papers on adolescents and children in divorce.

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AIFS Steering Committee comprised Don Edgar, AIFS Director, and AIFS Research Fellows Gay Ochiltree who took major responsibility for supervising the study throughout its progress, Margaret Harrison and Helen Glezer.

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This research was funded by the Australian Institute of Family Studies and designed to meet with Institute study design specifications. The Institute provided ongoing consultancy and supervision and we are grateful for its agreement to fund a further follow-up study on the same families.

Macquarie University provided additional financial and administrative support for which we are also grateful.

The authors acknowledge the cooperation of the Family Court of Australia and in particular the help of Sophy Bordow, Research Psychologist, for handling Court sampling procedures. Our thanks also go to the New South Wales Department of Education for granting us access to high school facilities.

We also wish to thank our statistical consultant, Associate Professor George Cooney; research assistants, Kerry Borthwick, Philip Nettleton and Margaret Kennedy; and our team of interviewers.

Special thanks go to our respective families whose assistance ranged from carpentry to coding, learning to cook, and support through ups and downs.

Above all, to the parents and adolescents who took part in this study, our warm thanks.

Rosemary Dunlop

Ailsa Burns

To ensure confidentiality for respondents and their families, all names and personal details used throughout this book are fictitious. Photographs throughout the book are not photographs of respondents in the study.

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PREFACE

When a marriage breaks down, each family goes through the crisis stage in a different way. Some can deal with it effectively. Others descend too easily into long drawn out conflict. As Tolstoy said: 'All happy families resemble one another, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way'.

The Family Court, of necessity, has to deal with families during a period of crisis and conflict. The more intense the crisis and the greater the conflict then the more likely it is that the family will have extended contact with the Court and the Counselling Service.

The result is that people working in the family law system see a great deal of the trauma and upset experienced by parents and especially by children after separation. That is the stage at which we deal with them. What happens thereafter? Do children fare better or worse after separation? Do the interventions of the Court process help or hinder adjustment? The Court does not have continuing contact with families as they regain stability in their lives. The more effective their efforts, the less likely such families will need further assistance from the Court.

Partly because the Family Court would like to know, in a systematic way, what happens to the families we deal with, we were happy to cooperate in the research project on which this book is based and to invite some of our clients in the Sydney region to participate. By these means we could contribute to a wider understanding of families and young people in crisis and at the same time gain some feedback on our own processes.

It is reassuring and encouraging to read this study and to discover that teenage adjustment is much the same for children from divorcing families as for those in intact families. The factors that make a difference to the well-being of young people are more subtle than the issue of whether their parents separate or remain living together. Despite the sadness and upset which many young people experience as a result of family breakdown, their ability to cope depends largely on the quality of the relationship between parents and children. The level of conflict is a negative influence, whether or not separation has occurred.

When parents are under emotional stress they are sometimes unable to respond adequately to the needs of their children. The process of counselling and conciliation in the Family Court tries to help people to stand back and look at matters from the children's viewpoint and to consider objectively the needs of their children. This can help parents to accept the responsibility of making their own joint decisions about the future.

In analysing the process of teenage adjustment, this study gives many insights into the feelings of young people and their viewpoint on the emotional dramas of the adults around them. The message is clear enough: everyone involved in marital breakdown and separation, whether parents, counsellors, lawyers or the Court, should have as their aim the reduction of conflict and the early resolution of disputes. This has been an article of faith for the Court for a long time. '*Don't feel the world is caving in*' provides supportive evidence.

For the general reader, one of the most interesting parts of the study will be the case histories and adolescent perspectives in which the thoughts and feelings of young people are so eloquently expressed in their own words. The pointers for parents are a valuable contribution to those whose task it is to provide information, education and counselling in this field.

The conclusions make important findings about the need for speedy determination of contested cases and the benefits of flexible access. The need for extra resources in the Court to overcome delays is already recognised. Its bearing upon the wellbeing of young people and their ability to adjust is clearly made in the summary.

I congratulate the Australian Institute of Family Studies and the authors, and commend the book to the attention of parents and policy makers.

The Hon. Justice Elizabeth Evatt, A.O.
Chief Judge
Family Court of Australia

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

This study is about the question of how adolescent children are affected when their parents divorce.

In Part One, the results of a series of quantitative analyses are presented. In Part Two, case histories are presented and themes emerging from a qualitative examination of interview material are integrated with findings from the statistical analyses. In Part Three, suggestions for the application of the study's results are presented. The following outline indicates the structure of the report and summarises its main findings.

Our broad hypothesis is that family structure (that is, whether parents are together or are divorcing) will not of itself predict adolescent adjustment. Adjustment will depend on processes within the family and especially on the adolescent's perception of these events.

In *Part One*, Chapter 1 reviews the research literature and outlines the rationale for the study. Chapter 2 describes the characteristics of the research sample and the control group of non-divorcing families. Chapter 3 outlines the methods and measures adopted for the study.

In Chapter 4, the adjustment scores of adolescents from divorcing and non-divorcing families are compared. No differences are found. Overall, boys are rather better adjusted than girls. Family structure, therefore, does not predict adjustment on the 13 outcome variables employed.

In Chapter 5, three types of family processes — happiness, conflict, and parent–child relationships — are examined. It is found that conflict is significantly related to adjustment in both family groups, but that the absolute level of family happiness predicts good adjustment only among the intact families. The quality of parent–child relationships is highly correlated with child adjustment for the sample as a whole, although linkages are different for divorcing and intact groups. Adolescents in both family groups who have a good relationship with at least one parent have a higher level of adjustment than those who lack this support.

Chapter 6 examines divorcing families only. Perception of the family as more contented and less conflictual since the separation is found to be the

most powerful predictor of adolescent adjustment.

Turning from adjustment to maturity, Chapter 7 reports no measurable differences between the developmental levels of the adolescents from intact and separated homes. Developmental progress is significantly linked to age but not to group. It is suggested that divorce may affect maturity in ways that are more amenable to qualitative analysis.

In Chapter 8, an independent measure of adolescent adjustment and maturity based on parents' appraisal of their children is described. No differences are found between adolescents from intact and divorcing families, supporting the previous results which used self-report scales. Significant relationships between parental appraisal and adolescent ratings of parental care and overprotection are found.

In *Part Two*, qualitative evidence is presented to illuminate and interpret the statistical results. Chapters 9 and 10 present case histories so that issues raised in the earlier analysis can be seen in the context of people's lives. Chapter 11 draws together themes from the interview material, relating them to the statistical results. It is suggested that adolescents possess developmental strengths which aid in coping with divorce.

In *Part Three*, Chapter 12 summarises the results and suggests some ways in which the findings may be of use to parents and to policy makers.

Part One

DOES DIVORCE AFFECT ADOLESCENT ADJUSTMENT?

Quantitative Analyses

1

MULTIPLE ASPECTS OF DIVORCE

Divorce is a highly personal affair. Individuals experience it in many different ways. For some it is the collapse of a much-loved family circle, for others it is a welcome relief from tension and, sometimes, violence.

It is widely believed that teenagers from broken homes are more likely to be maladjusted than those from intact families. Little is really known about whether this notion is merely a stereotype, or whether it has a firm basis in reality. Studies of juvenile delinquents, reports of clinicians working with disturbed youngsters, and surveys of homeless boys and girls have all reported a high incidence of disrupted family life. These findings are alarming, but what is often overlooked is that the studies start with a group that is *already* defined as a problem. Very little is known about the far greater numbers of children who do not end up in juvenile courts, at the psychiatrist, or on the streets.

This study shows some of the ways in which the divorce of their parents has affected the lives of adolescents, and the remarkable maturity, discernment and compassion of many of these young people.

Children of Divorce

As in most Western countries, the divorce rate has been climbing steadily in Australia during this century. In 1976 a new divorce act came into force: the *Family Law Act* (1975) replaced matrimonial fault as the basis of divorce with the concept of irretrievable break-down of marriage, demonstrated by separation for a minimum of 12 months. Divorce figures rose sharply in 1976 and remained somewhat inflated as people who had been unable to divorce under the *Matrimonial Causes Act* (1959), or who had waited in order to avoid the acrimony of the old divorce process, sought dissolution under the new Act. By 1979, the rate had dropped to a point consistent with the steady rise that had been taking place before the introduction of the Act.

Since 1982 there has been a slight but steady decrease in the Australian divorce rate.

In 1982, the year of the present study, one new divorce occurred for approximately every three new marriages taking place in Australia. Of these, about 26 500 divorces involved children under the age of 18. In all, 53 010 children were involved in that year alone. A little over a third of divorces involve couples without dependent children. Where children are present, the average number per divorcing family has remained fairly steady at two (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1983).

It is clear, then, that very many more children experience the break-up of their family than the minority that enter the records as juvenile offenders or psychiatric patients. We have sought to reach this largely unknown group of children in the hope of finding out not only how well-adjusted they are, but also the more subtle ways in which the experience of divorce may affect their relationships with their parents and their attitudes and expectations about their own lives.

Divorce is clearly a disturbing and often profoundly sad event for children. However, children of divorce can no longer be regarded as an exceptional group. Uncritical acceptance of the view that divorce is *inevitably* damaging may act as a self-fulfilling prophecy, leading teachers and others who work with adolescents to expect, and find, long-term trouble. This

may be grossly unfair to those young people who experience considerable stress during their family's upheaval, but who work through this crisis and return to a normal level of adolescent functioning. The view that behavioural and other problems are a necessary consequence of 'the broken home' is dangerous for several reasons.

First, adolescents from divorced families may be labelled as deviant and come to accept the label themselves, with consequent damage to their self-esteem and anxiety about their future. Second, the assumption that behavioural or other problems are *caused* by divorce may mask other reasons for these difficulties. The tendency to attribute all problems to the divorce may magnify normal adolescent ups and downs, or prevent a thorough search for the root cause and its solution. Third, the assumption that all children of divorce will be damaged draws attention away from the need to identify those adolescents who are particularly at risk. Recognition of the diversity of responses to divorce allows us to examine those factors that contribute to successful adjustment, and those that alert us to special vulnerability.

It is necessary, then, to go beyond asking the question 'Does divorce harm children?' by asking 'What factors help children to survive divorce successfully? What factors are damaging to children, in both intact and divorcing families?'

'In the Best Interests of the Child'

A fundamental doctrine of Family Law is that judicial decisions about arrangements for children of divorce should be made 'in the best interests of the child'. Obviously most parents, also, wish to arrange things so that their children will be least hurt by the break-up of their marriage. But problems exist in delineating a child's best interests, especially when they may not coincide with those of separating parents.

There is a need for information distinguishing the various dimensions of the divorce experience so cases that are qualitatively different can be better understood. Especially important is the need to gather information from children themselves. Children are participants in a family crisis — not the 'property' of their parents, nor passive respondents.

A child's position in a divorce is very different from that of parents. Once the parents' decision to part is made, their goal is to conclude the relationship and withdraw their emotional investment from one another. Divorce, however, does not dissolve a child's emotional ties with his or her parents. The process of recovery from divorce for a child involves the psychological re-structuring of the family, not its dissolution.

For these reasons, the best interests of the child may run counter to those of parents. The prime goal of the present research is to present an adolescent's-eye-view of divorce, avoiding, where possible, distorting assumptions and seeking to specify factors that facilitate adaptation to a new family form.

In addition, non-divorcing families are examined to identify factors that help adolescents and their parents in both types of family to evolve relationships that promote the child's smooth transition to adulthood. In both intact and separated families similar developmental processes are occurring and families play an immensely important role in helping a child to become mature and self-determining.

Past Divorce Research

To date, there has been little Australian research on the impact of divorce on children, so most of our information is from overseas studies.

Early reports revealing that children were adversely affected by their parents' separation came from two main sources: studies of juvenile delinquents and reports by clinicians. In view of the rising divorce rate, these findings raised considerable anxiety and prompted a spate of studies on the effects of divorce on children and adolescents. Typically, these compared children from homes where the father was absent with those from intact families to see whether there were differences in such areas as self-concept, sex-role identity, anti-social behaviour, or school adjustment.

Biller (1970) and Herzog and Sudia (1973) carried out searching reviews of this literature and pointed out that studies were often badly designed. Sampling methods were poor, and the studies failed to take account of important factors that should have been examined, including age of the child at the time of separation, circumstances of the father's absence, supports available to the mother, and factors affecting the family both before and after separation. In obtaining their samples, researchers frequently failed to ensure that both groups of families were from the same social class. In the American cities where most of this research was carried out, fathers were more likely to be absent among the poor; there was a higher rate of juvenile delinquency in this sector of the population. The fact of poverty rather than parental separation might explain a whole range of poorer outcomes for the single-parent families in these studies.

A series of studies by Parish and co-workers in Kansas have repeatedly found lower self-concepts among children and adolescents from divorced families than from intact families (Young and Parish, 1977; Parish and Taylor, 1979; Parish and Dostal, 1980 a and b). These results are contrary to a number of studies from other parts of the United States which found no differences on a variety of measures between adolescents from intact and separated homes. It is hard to say whether this discrepancy is due to cultural differences between mid-west Kansas and New York (Feldman and Feldman, 1975), Virginia (Raschke and Raschke, 1979), Ohio (Berg and Kelly, 1979), Washington (Landis, 1953; Nye, 1957; Burchinal, 1964), and New Orleans (Pardeck and Izikoff, 1983), or whether it is due to the rather simple measure of self-concept used by Parish, or to other aspects of design.

In a recent national study Furstenberg and Seltzer (1983) interviewed 1423 American 12 to 16 year-olds by telephone. Although they found some deficits in school, family and general adjustment for adolescents who had experienced separation or divorce in comparison with those from happy, stable families, they comment:

> In delineating these relative differences we should not lose sight of the important fact that the great majority of children who have experienced a disruption (i.e. separation or divorce) are rather well-adjusted. Only a small minority, even of those whose parents have married and divorced two or more times, are not performing satisfactorily at school . . . All the measures we inspected suggest that marital disruption affects only a minority of children. (p.15)

When Furstenberg and Seltzer controlled statistically for socio-economic and racial factors, they found that the differences in adjustment decreased, but did not disappear. The ill-effects could, in part, be explained by families trapped in the culture of poverty described above.

An even stronger result was obtained in a large-scale English study, the National Child Development Study, whose sample consisted of every child born in the British Isles during one week in 1958. An initial sample of 17 000 children has been followed up over 23 years. On a measure of school adjustment it was found that children with a lone parent did less well than those from intact families; however, when socio-economic factors were controlled this difference disappeared (Fogelman, 1984).

From an accumulating body of research it emerges that separation or divorce do not, after all, inevitably produce problem children. Other factors must be sought which interact or co-exist with family disruption to account for the greater vulnerability of some children to this event.

Most of the studies referred to have used traditional research techniques. Standard measures or questionnaires were administered, sometimes to whole groups at a time in a school or college setting. The results show group patterns but do not give any insight into how individuals respond within a family context.

Clinical reports are usually of a very different kind. The clinician derives impressions from intimate knowledge of numerous individual cases and can provide glimpses of the child within the family setting. These reports, however, are necessarily based on the special group of disturbed children whose parents seek help. They are also strongly influenced by the theoretical orientation of the clinician. Ackerman (1962) and Sorosky (1977) write about adolescents and divorce from a clinical perspective, as do Wallerstein and Kelly (1974, 1980) — discussed more fully later in this report. Kalter and Rembar (1981) have used clinical reports as a basis for a sophisticated analysis of the association between developmental stage at separation and type of difficulty experienced by children and adolescents.

The clinicians' view is often a rather dark one. They see children suffering from major psychological disturbance, and do not usually have access to a comparison group of normally functioning children of divorce. Their con-

tribution is important as it throws light on particularly vulnerable children; it can also point to issues that may affect non-clinical families. But one cannot generalise these findings, as they stand, to the wider divorcing population.

Since the early studies of divorce, researchers have become increasingly aware of the complex nature of this experience. It has become clear that a simple comparison between intact and separated families is inadequate. A child's response may depend on a whole host of factors both within and beyond the family. Furthermore, a static comparison fails to take account of the fluid, changing character of families in transition.

In an important review article, Marotz-Baden, Adams, Bueche, Munro and Munro (1979) point out that much divorce writing is based on a 'deficit family' assumption, an approach which assumes that a non-traditional family structure is in itself damaging to children. In their view such a position is not only out of touch with the realities of the modern world but also fails to take sufficient account of the 'active and adaptive' capacities of both children and adults. The notion that divorce 'impacts' on a passively respondent child harks back to an outmoded view of child psychology. Cognitive psychologists have demonstrated clearly that children are active makers of meaning, interpreting and making sense of the events around them, and reacting according to their understanding of these processes.

Marotz-Baden and colleagues (1979) argue that rather than emphasising family form, researchers should examine the processes occurring within families. Family processes, they believe, are the essential key to a child's well-being, irrespective of family form.

Dimensions of the Experience of Divorce

For the purposes of the present study, 'family processes' refer to intra-familial variables such as level of family conflict and type and quality of parent–child relationships. 'Structure' refers to whether the marital partners are together or in the process of divorcing. Demographic variables such as income, parental education and occupation are examined separately.

Family processes

Conflict

There is considerable evidence that living in an atmosphere of conflict or high family tension is damaging to children whatever the family structure.

In a wide-ranging review of the literature on family conflict, Emery (1982) shows that inter-parental conflict rather than divorce in itself is likely to be responsible for disturbance among children. Anthony (1974a) cites clinical evidence indicating that children from unhappy, intact homes are often more disturbed than children of divorce. This finding has also been

reported by non-clinical researchers. Nye (1957) found that teenagers from unhappy intact homes were more delinquent, had worse relationships with their parents and more psychosomatic symptoms than children from single-parent homes. Raschke and Raschke (1979) also found lower self-concept scores for adolescents reporting high family conflict, whether from single-parent or intact homes. The child who finds divorce a welcome relief from conflict will experience it very differently from one who saw the family as happy until one parent become involved with another partner, as Landis (1960) found and Burns (1980) described in her Australian study.

The divorce itself may also have a different impact according to the amount of turbulance surrounding the case. A Danish study (Brun, 1971) reported a high degree of psychiatric disturbance among children caught up in a bitter divorce, while in South Africa, Rosen (1979) found that only in cases where divorce conflict was highly acrimonious were children less adjusted than those from intact families.

But divorce does not necessarily mean the end of fighting. Cline and Westman (1971) found in a study of Minnesota court records that 52 per cent of their sample of 105 families were involved in at least one further court case in the two years following divorce, while 31 per cent required from two to ten court interventions in this period. Australians tend to resort to the courts less readily than Americans. The philosophy of the *Family Law Act* (1975) is that couples should be encouraged to make their own decisions about the future of their children, rather than relying on judicial solutions. The Family Court Counselling Service was set up to provide parents with the opportunity to solve their problems out of court. Horwill's (1979) study of custody cases in the Family Court of Australia reported the encouraging result that only 14 per cent were fully contested, the majority being decided by mutual consent. In 1983, the proportion of defended custody cases was reported as 'about 10 per cent' (Horwill and Bordow, 1983).

Legal battles, however, are only part of the picture. Conflict between partners may continue for many years after a marriage is legally over, and children often become the pawns in a power game between their parents. Post-divorce hostility continues to exert a negative influence on children (Jacobson, 1978; Westman, Cline, Swift and Kramer, 1970).

Parent–child relations

In a series of well-designed English studies, Rutter (1971) showed that a child's adjustment was related to the degree of marital conflict and to parents' psychological disturbance. At the same time, he showed that a good relationship with one parent significantly reduced the probability of maladjustment, even when the family was severely disturbed.

As part of the Australian Institute of Family Studies major project, *Children in Families*, Ochiltree and Amato (1984) examined the effects of both marital conflict and parent–child relationships. Children's self-esteem was found to be related to the quality of these relationships, irrespective of whether both parents were present. Among intact families, marital conflict was strongly associated with poor self-esteem for primary school girls, but

not boys. It was weakly associated with self-esteem for both male and female adolescents, and negatively affected father–child, but not mother–child, relationships (Amato, 1986b). For both older and younger pupils, the quality of family relationships, including parental support and age-appropriate control, was significantly related to measures of competent functioning (Amato and Ochiltree, in press).

An analysis of family processes comparing children and adolescents from intact, step and mother-headed families was also carried out (Amato, 1986a). Patterns emerged showing that although the parenting role of non-custodial fathers was seen by their children as significantly slighter than that of fathers in intact families, maternal support was constant across all groups. These authors suggest that parental conflict may have an adverse impact on a child both directly and by affecting a child's relationship with one or other parent, a situation which may be particularly stressful if the child is strongly attached to both parents.

Other Australian studies also draw attention to the quality of family life. Cooper, Holman and Braithwaite (1983) found the self-esteem of Canberra primary school children was related to the cohesiveness of the family rather than whether both parents were together or not. Contrary to the findings of Ochiltree and Amato, and Cooper, Holman and Braithwaite, Harper and Ryder (1986) found the self-concept of father-absent adolescent boys from a Sydney Catholic school was lower than those from intact families. But they, too, found self-esteem to be significantly associated with the quality of parent–child relationships.

Post-divorce relations with parents have been shown in numerous studies to be an important factor in a child's adjustment. McLoughlin and Whitfield (1984) found parental behaviour played a major part in the adjustment of adolescents from a Sydney sample consisting of families in dispute about custody, access or child welfare.

Hess and Camara (1979) report that their sample of American 9 to 11 year-olds were best able to adjust when both separated parents maintained a warm relationship with the child without making conflicting demands upon him or her. In their well-designed long-term study of the effects of divorce on pre-school children, Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1979) found that there is often a drop in the quality of a mother's relationship with her child in the stressful period immediately following divorce. This tends to improve with time, and the best outcome for children can be expected where the father also maintains a close relationship with the child.

However, Kurdek, Blisk and Siesky (1981) found that infrequent contacts with the absent parent were associated with better adjustment among their 8 to 18 year-olds. This apparently contradictory result suggests that it is the quality of the child's relationship with the non-custodial parent rather than the frequency of contact which is important.

Family conflict and relationships between parents and children thus influence the ways in which children react to divorce. A number of other issues also may affect a child's adjustment.

Other factors affecting reaction to divorce

Factors beyond the family are not always included in divorce studies, but research has shown that they may contribute in important ways to the impact of divorce. The degree of social support available to the parent, and to the child, may affect their capacity to cope with the crisis. Financial hardship may have profound consequences. Other changes in the child's life may accompany the family break-up; moving to a new neighbourhood, changing schools and adjusting to a parent's new partner often present taxing challenges to a child as well as the grief of separation from one parent and the collapse of the familiar family circle.

Anthony (1974a) stresses that some children appear to be more vulnerable than others to the effects of family break-up. Dynamics within the family may mean that children have closer ties with one parent than another and experience the departure of a father, for instance, very differently. But it also seems that some children are more sensitive or have fewer coping resources than others.

Past research also suggests that boys and girls may experience parental discord and family break-up differently. These studies, most of which are with pre-school and primary school aged children, show that boys seem to be more disturbed initially, and may take longer to adjust (Hetherington, 1979; Rutter, 1970; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980; Emery, Hetherington and DiLalla, 1984). This may be related to the fact that often it is the father who leaves the home.

Finally, some studies indicate that children respond differently to parental separation according to their age when parents part. The most influential treatment of this question is that of Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) who have developed a typology of emotional responses to divorce classified according to psychoanalytic developmental stages. Longfellow (1979) has pointed out that social cognitive developmental stages are also likely to contribute to divorce adjustment. Kalter and Rembar (1981) found no systematic relationship between age at separation and *degree* of subsequent disturbance, but revealed links between developmental stage and *type* of later adjustment problems. Separation during the Oedipal stage was associated with aggressive and academic problems when girls (but not boys) became adolescent. No clear results emerged for those older than six when their parents separated.

Until recently few studies have looked specifically at the impact of divorce on adolescents, and of those that have, the majority fail to discriminate between children who have lived for most of their lives in single-parent homes or with step-parents, or those whose parents remained together until children were adolescent. Only one major study (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980) has included a group of children who were teenagers at the time of the divorce.

In her study of adolescent girls, Hetherington (1972) reported that the loss of a father at an earlier age appeared to affect her subjects more adversely than later separation. It is important not to confuse growing up as a

child of divorce with experiencing divorce at adolescence.

Despite Hetherington's findings, for special reasons adolescence may be a difficult time for family break-up to occur.

Adolescence — A Time of Rapid Change

For most teenagers, adolescence is a time of many changes: puberty and awakening sexuality bring excitements and also anxieties; social horizons change rapidly with the move from primary to secondary school; the world of friends and school mates becomes increasingly important and there is corresponding pressure for more freedom from parental control, more independence and autonomy.

The traditional psychoanalytic view is that adolescence is necessarily a time of turmoil through which the youngster achieves emotional independence from parents. Erikson (1968) sees it as a period of crisis when the young person strives to create a sense of personal identity out of a multitude of surrounding influences.

Rutter's large-scale English study of 14 and 15 year-olds on the Isle of Wight (1976) found about half showing some evidence of emotional turmoil, but he believed previous writers had overemphasised the psychiatric significance of this aspect of adolescence.

The American psychiatrists Offer, Ostrov and Howard (1981) believe the

average adolescent handles the demands of this stage of life without undue stress, backing this with results of studies of teenagers from a number of different countries, including Australia. They point out that because there are many adjustments to be made, some teenagers progress more swiftly in one direction than another. A child may be emotionally well-adjusted but rather behind in sexual attitudes or in coping with the external world, for example. This imbalance may create strains, but many different paths to adjustment exist and as time goes on the average child achieves a balance between these different elements.

The debate about whether adolescence is necessarily a time of crisis or whether it is simply a period of transition has continued for about 50 years. It seems clear, however, that for most adolescents it is a time of major readjustment.

As the adolescent grows older he or she must leave the family circle. Relationships with parents will inevitably change as the young person prepares to enter the adult world. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) point out that for most youngsters the family serves an important function as a home base from which to explore the world and a haven to which to retreat. Just as Offer and colleagues see development occurring along a number of dimensions which may not all be synchronised, so Wallerstein and Kelly see the adolescent as progressing in fits and starts — moving out and then retreating, and with growing confidence forming more contacts with the world beyond the family. In the process, the young person's relationship with parents becomes less dependent; he or she begins to see them as people rather than idealised parental figures. At the same time, the existence of a parental value system provides a framework which offers security in a confusing world. The family provides a launching pad and also a recovery zone.

What effects is divorce likely to have at this stage of a child's development? When the adolescent is experiencing so many personal changes, what happens when the structure of the family also undergoes radical change? If it is normal to expect changes in parent–child relationships at adolescence, does divorce speed up this process? If so, is this helpful or damaging to the teenager?

Age-related responses to divorce

There have been no Australian studies looking specifically at the effects of parental separation at adolescence in the general divorcing population. Eleanor Hodges (1981) examined the attitudes of middle class teenage boys and girls with a background of earlier divorce. Other studies, such as those of Ochiltree and Amato (1984, 1986), Cooper, Holman and Braithwaite (1983), and Harper and Ryder (1986), referred to earlier, provide useful comparative material for the present study, although their main focus is not on adolescents' current responses to their parents' divorce. The study by McLoughlin and Whitfield (1984) provides valuable interview material, but concerns a special group of adolescents.

The major overseas study is that of Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) which examined the effects of divorce on children of different ages ranging from pre-school to adolescence. For this reason their influential California Children in Divorce Project has become the chief source of information about age-related responses to divorce, especially for adolescents. The project was set up in 1971. Of the 60 families who participated, 58 were re-interviewed a year later and again in 1977 and 1981. The two principal researchers are clinicians with a psychoanalytic background and the method which this research uses is the clinical case history. Their sample of adolescents was small and the age range broad. They interviewed 18 adolescents aged between 13 and 18 as part of their larger study.

Wallerstein and Kelly had expected that adolescents would be less openly distressed than pre-school and primary school children. Instead they were surprised at the intensely painful reactions they observed. Adolescents reacted with anger, shame and embarrassment and with great unhappiness to the breaking up of the family. They often expressed anxiety about their own future marital happiness and many became involved in conflicts over loyalty to each parent.

The researchers believed one explanation for the intensity of these reactions was that the normal developmental processes of adolescence interacted with the divorce experience, producing heightened feelings of anxiety and loss. Just when adolescent sexuality was beginning to emerge, parents were also seen to be involved with new sexual partners, sometimes not much older than the adolescents themselves. Just as the child was preparing to move out into the world, he or she found a parent engaged in a similar process. The family was no longer a secure and dependable base. Such a situation places pressures on the adolescent to grow up quickly, and Wallerstein and Kelly are concerned lest this apparent maturity should turn out to be of a short-lived 'hot-house' kind.

In their follow-up interviews the researchers found it was hard to predict from their earlier impressions what the long-term adjustment of these youngsters would be like. The teenagers apparently handling the experience with the least disturbance were those initially able to distance themselves from their parents' troubles.

Wallerstein and Kelly's California Children of Divorce Project is a landmark in divorce research because it sees the child in the context of the family. It contains a wealth of information, examining family relationships in depth and providing both the parents' and the child's perspective. However, one should be cautious about accepting these results without qualification. The study was established as a divorce counselling service. The authors explain that these families differ from a typical clinical sample in that they were not referred because of adjustment problems but voluntarily participated in order to gain advice about how to handle family problems. Despite this assurance the design and methods of this study raise questions about how widely the results can be generalised to a general divorcing population.

Marin County, California, where the study took place, is an affluent middle class region with one of the highest divorce rates in the United States. People seeking divorce counselling may therefore represent a group with special problems or unusual anxiety about their children. No standard measures of adjustment with norms based on general populations were used, nor was a control group of intact families included in the study. The findings therefore depend entirely on the insight of the clinicians and their judgement as to whether the behaviour they observed was normal or abnormal. This criticism is particularly telling in that one of their main concerns was with the impact of divorce on the developmental process, yet they had no comparison group of children of the same ages from intact families. A further problem is that the program of counselling which they offered would be expected to affect the long-term findings.

Perhaps most caution should be felt about the particular theoretical framework used by these clinicians. Psychoanalysis makes strong assumptions about the nature of relationships between parents and children: Oedipal conflicts are said to re-emerge at adolescence, and much emphasis is placed on the need to maintain generational boundaries. Less attention is paid to the child's cognitive development and the shift towards a more egalitarian relationship with adults. Judgements about adjustment must been seen in the light of these theoretical assumptions.

In spite of these problems, the study has real strengths. The rapport established by long in-depth interviews is borne out by the astonishing retention rate in the follow-up studies. The information gained allows a far richer and more detailed picture of these families to emerge than the survey-style research using questionnaires on which much divorce research is based. Furthermore, it is the only long-term detailed study of this kind which catches families at the time of divorce and follows them through.

Another comparable long-term study including adolescents is one by Kurdek, Blisk and Siesky (1981). These researchers did not interview families at the time of divorce, but avoided clinical bias by selecting their sample through a parents' social organisation, Parents Without Partners. Their sample of 58 children had an average age of 13.09 years, but ranged in age from 8 to 17. In contrast to the case history approach of the previous study, Kurdek and his associates used semi-structured interviews and standard measures. Their results were based on statistical analyses of measures of 'understanding' and 'feelings' about the divorce, internal and external locus of control, level of interpersonal reasoning, parent and child adjustment and background variables.

When a sub-sample of families was re-interviewed two years later it was found that while there were no great problems in the overall adjustment of the children, their understanding and feelings about the divorce were not necessarily congruent. Approximately four years after the separation most understood the reasons for the divorce, but still felt fairly negatively about it. At a follow-up interview two years later these negative feelings had generally diminished.

These authors note that parents' reports about their children's perceptions and reactions to the divorce are not always consistent with those of the youngsters themselves. Other writers, including Wallerstein and Kelly, have also pointed out that parents, caught up in their own emotional turmoil, are not always able to evaluate their children's responses accurately.

It is interesting to compare these two studies. Wallerstein and Kelly are sometimes accused of lacking scientific rigour in their methodology but their case histories give a vivid picture of the experience of the teenagers and their families. The analysis of Kurdek, Blisk and Siesky is complex and rigorous, but provides only group trends and relationships. Neither research project has a control group of non-divorcing families to act as a comparison group.

The Present Study

Our study seeks to build upon the research that has gone before and to break new ground. The method combines lengthy semi-structured interviews with the use of standard measures. In addition, a control group of families whose parents are together is included. In both cases teenagers were interviewed independently, and where possible both parents were seen. In this way we have been able to gather data which can be subjected to statistical analysis, but we also have a large amount of qualitative material which enables us to gain a picture of each case in its particular context. The intact families provide a comparison group from which to evaluate the effects of divorce on adjustment and also the developmental progress of the children whose parents have separated.

Our first aim is to see whether there are differences in adjustment between adolescents whose parents are in the process of divorcing and the wider population of teenagers whose parents are together. To what extent is the view that adolescents from 'broken homes' are 'disturbed' justified for these currently divorcing families?

We also want to find out whether there are any factors which tend to contribute to good or poor adjustment among the divorcing group.

In addition, we look at the more subtle aspects of divorce in order to understand how the youngsters have experienced the event, and what particular factors they feel have made it easier or more difficult. We look at how the experience has affected their relationships with their parents, their developing maturity and their expectations for the future.

Our broad hypothesis is that family structure (whether a family is intact or separated) will not of itself predict adolescent adjustment. Adjustment will depend on processes within the family and on the adolescent's perception of these events.

2

FAMILIES WHO TOOK PART

The necessity of obtaining a representative sample of divorcing families was confirmed in discussions with the Australian Institute of Family Studies and with counselling and judicial staff of the Family Court of Australia. Court staff are principally concerned with the problems of the least coping and most conflicted families, and the question they continally face is: must it always be like this, or are there families 'out there' in the community where parents and children are making a success of divorce? In making hard decisions that will have long-term consequences for families, counsellors and judges need guidelines derived from the experience of those ordinary families whose children do not inevitably find themselves in the clinician's waiting room or the juvenile court. So too, of course, do parents and children want to know what family disruption may mean for their own futures.

The usefulness of research depends very much on the degree to which the findings can be applied to a wider population. Through the cooperation of the Family Court of Australia and the New South Wales Department of Education, we have been fortunate in procuring a group of families with teenagers who represent a broad sample of the divorcing population, and a comparable group whose parents are together.

The sample is not a clinical one. Some parents have sought help for themselves or their children, but most have not felt the need for professional aid. They represent a wide range of occupations and incomes, although rural jobs are not included as our study is restricted to the greater metropolitan area of Sydney.

Sydney is the capital city of the state of New South Wales. It has a population of three and a half million people, and extends from the beaches of the Pacific Ocean to the lower slopes of the Blue Mountains. Our sample represents both the inner industrial suburbs and the new working class areas on the outskirts of the city. It also takes in the beaches with their distinctively hedonistic sub-culture, and the wealthy tree-lined suburbs of the north shore and eastern harbourside.

Divorcing Families

Because of the confidentiality of its clients, letters were sent on our behalf by the Principal Registrar of the Family Court to 273 people making application for divorce over a 9-month period in 1982. The nature of the research was explained and clients were asked if they would agree to take part. The names of those who agreed were then passed on to us.

The advantages of this method of recruitment are clear. We had access to the whole range of divorcing families from the Sydney and Parramatta registries. We were also able to specify the characteristics needed for the research so that the Court sent letters only to those families satisfying geographical and other criteria. Eleven families who had moved from the metropolitan area since filing for divorce were subsequently dropped from the sample.

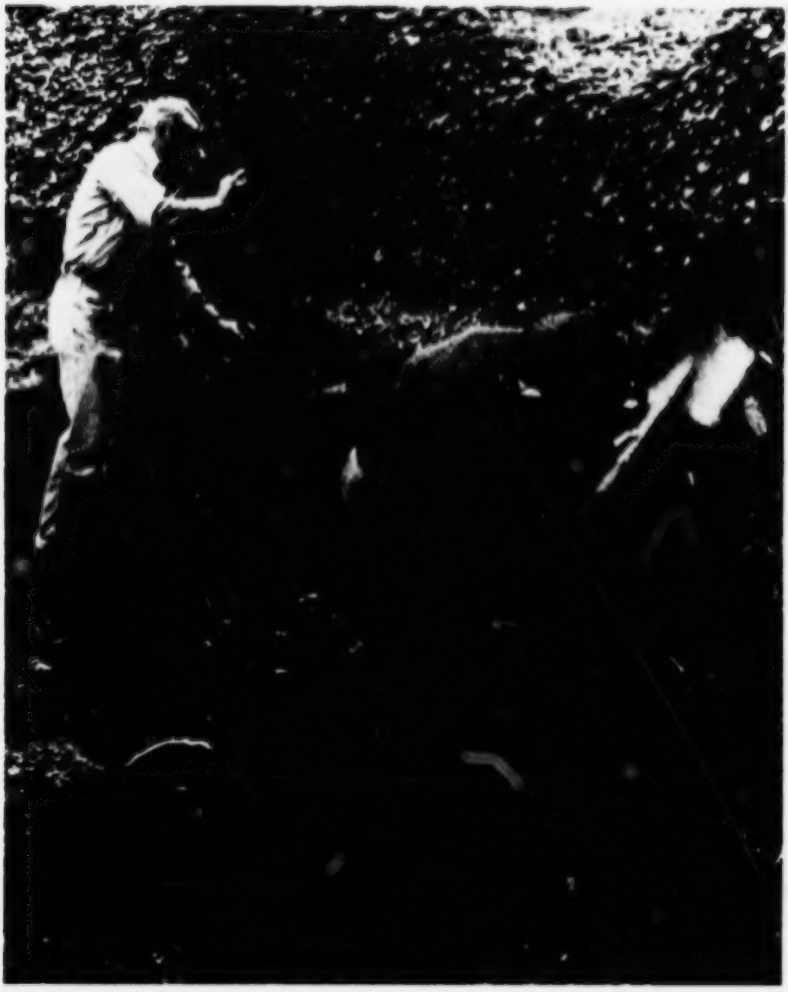
Many previous studies of the impact of divorce on children have failed to record how long parents have been divorced, and have not discriminated between the divorce itself and the more psychologically stressful event of the final separation. Under the *Family Law Act* (1975) at least 12 months must elapse between separation and dissolution. We specified that our subjects should not have been apart for longer than two and a half years, thus eliminating those people who might have been living apart for many years before filing for divorce. All our subjects were within weeks of the actual divorce, and the final separation had occurred, on average, 18 months previously.

'Adolescence' covers a wide range of ages. We wished to limit our sample to the early and middle years and asked that the children should be between the ages of 13 and 16. One teenager had had her seventeenth birthday, but the average age of the divorcing sample was 15 years.

Although people were asked by official letter from the Court if they would take part in the research, participation was voluntary. With any sample of this nature it is important to ascertain whether there are any hidden biases arising from systematic differences between those who take part and those who do not. Accurate description of the sample ensures that the results can be generalised appropriately.

Failure to respond is a common problem with divorce research (Spanier, 1976). A Swedish study by Trost and Hultaker (1982) achieved a 50 per cent response rate only after seven successive questionnaires were sent out over a 12-month period. In the present study the Court sent only one letter to each applicant and the researchers had no access to names other than those who consented. Letters went only to the person who filed the divorce application; this was not necessarily the parent with whom the adolescent lived. Forty-eight per cent of the 273 people contacted by the Court replied to the letter; of these, 39 per cent agreed to participate and the remainder declined.

Some people contacted the researchers or the Court to explain their reasons for not participating. These were varied and did not appear to indicate



any bias towards higher or lower family turbulence among those who did not take part (see below). The research design required personal interviews with each parent and the adolescent. A number of parents were willing to take part themselves but either had no access to their children (who were living with the other spouse, or had moved from Sydney), or felt that their children had settled down well and were unwilling to risk disturbing them. Others said it was too near the divorce and suggested we contact them again later. Some adolescents themselves did not wish to take part. In the shifting population of newly separated families a proportion may never have received the letter.

Were there differences between participant and non-participant families?

Court records are confidential to all but officers of the Court. On our behalf the research psychologist of the Family Court, Sophy Bordow, carried out an examination of the records of those to whom the Court sent letters in order to see whether there were any systematic differences between those who agreed to participate and those who either refused or who failed to reply.

Table 1: Divorcing population: % of each response category by ethnic origin

	Acceptance		*Refusal*		*No reply*		*Total*	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Anglo-Australian	45	88	68	85	106	75	219	80
Other	6	12	12	15	36	25	54	20
Total	51	100	80	100	142	100	273	100

Note: Ethnic origin was estimated by family name as information regarding place of birth was not available for the total population to whom letters were sent by the Court.

As Table 1 shows, there were somewhat more non-Anglo names among the non-respondents, but the difference was not significant ($\chi^2 = 5.3$; d.f. = 2; p = .07). Those who participated and those who refused are very similar ($\chi^2 = .29$; d.f. = 2; p = .50).

Table 2: Divorcing population: % of each response category by socio-economic status estimated by area of residence

	Acceptance		*Refusal*		*No reply*		*Total**	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Upper	9	19.15	8	10.95	16	11.27	33	12.60
Medium	19	40.43	32	43.84	39	27.47	90	34.35
Lower	19	40.43	33	45.21	87	61.27	139	53.00
Total	47	100	73	100	142	100	262	100

*Families not satisfying residential requirements are excluded.

Note: Socio-economic status was estimated from area of residence using Census figures for average male income per Sydney municipality, Poulsen and Spearritt, 1981.

Information regarding occupation, education level or income was not available for the non-respondents. An estimate of social class position was made from area of residence categorised by means of Australian Bureau of

Statistics census figures of average male income for Sydney municipalities (Poulsen and Spearritt, 1981).

As Table 2 shows, those who failed to reply were more likely to live in the lower income areas of Sydney than were those people who made contact with us ($\chi^2 = 10.68$; d.f. = 2; $p < .01$). However, when participants in the study are compared with non-participants (that is, non-respondents and refusers) there is no significant difference between the groups ($\chi^2 = 2.44$; d.f. = 2; $p = .12$).

Taken together, these figures suggest that there was little difference between participants and refusers in social background, but that non-respondents were likely to belong to the lower income sectors of the community. This is consistent with the pattern of other research in the social sciences, and means that we must be cautious about generalising our findings across the social spectrum. It should be noted, however, that analysis of interview responses indicates that over half the fathers in this sample have working class occupations.

Table 3: Divorcing population: % of each response category by whether applicant has custody of adolescent

	Acceptance		*Refusal*		*No reply*		*Total*	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Applicant has custody	32	64	33	49	51	37	116	45
Applicant does not have custody	18	36	35	51	87	63	140	55
Total	50	100	68	100	138	100	256	100

Note: For six eligible families this information was incomplete.

Table 3 shows that participants in the study were significantly more likely to have their children living with them than were refusers or non-respondents ($\chi^2 = 8.09$; d.f. = 2; $p = .005$). It appears from this that divorce applicants whose children were living with the other partner may have experienced difficulty in initiating arrangements for the family to take part in interviews, particularly at a time close to the actual divorce.

These demographic explanations suggest that factors other than those bearing directly on psychological adjustment have influenced participation. However, because of the important link found in past research between parental conflict and child adjustment, we wanted to see whether the families who consented to take part in the study were systematically different in this regard from those who refused.

The interviews show that our sample includes divorces of all kinds, ranging from relatively amicable decisions to part once children were past their early childhood, to cases of violence, incest and psychopathology. We did

not know, however, whether the proportion of more serious and conflictual cases was similar to that of the families who declined to take part.

A sub-group of these cases was examined by Bordow on our behalf in order to see whether the two groups had similar levels of conflict as defined by their involvement in court processes over and above their application for divorce. It was found that a somewhat higher proportion of participants than non-participants had engaged in defended disputes involving the Family Court during the 12 months after the divorce ($\chi^2 = 3.8$; d.f. = 1; p = .05). These cases typically involved property settlements: court wrangles over custody and access concerning adolescents are rare except where younger siblings are involved.

Differing ratios of disputes over property may reflect differences in socio-economic status, so the incidence of judicial restraining orders or injunctions was also examined. Injunctions restraining parties to the divorce from molestation and assault, access to the matrimonial home or property, or access to children may be seen as clear indicators of severity of conflict. The Court analysis revealed that 10 per cent of our sample had sought injunctions against their spouses, in comparison with 7 per cent of the sub-sample of those who declined to participate.

These findings indicate that the research sample is not biased towards families that are unrepresentative in being less conflictual than average. On the contrary, rather more of the adolescents in this study may have been exposed to family turbulence than those in the wider divorcing population.

The initial sample consisted of the first 40 divorcing families who satisfied our research criteria. We were pleased with the high proportion of cases where both the custodial and the non-custodial parents agreed to take part (almost half the sample). Interviews were carried out with at least one parent from each family — however, adolescents from three families were unwilling to participate, so these cases have been dropped from this report.

To avoid the artificial inflation of the parents' measures and to ensure the independence of each case, only one adolescent from each family was included.

Of the final divorced sample, ten teenagers were living with their fathers and 27 were with their mothers (see Table 4). One boy who saw his home base as his mother's house was actually living away from home. Four families were still living under the same roof although the parents were not cohabiting and were deemed to be separated under the requirements of the

Table 4: Composition of participating families

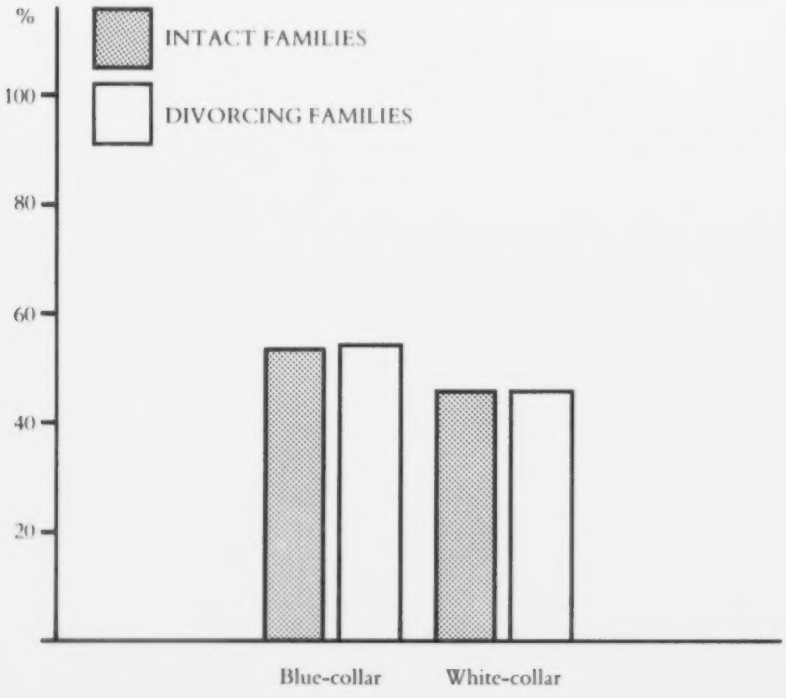
	Boys	Girls	Total
Divorced group			
With mother	12	15	27
With father	7	3	10
Total	19	18	37
Intact group	22	19	41

Family Law Act. For two boys and two girls the divorce was between a parent and a step-parent.

Intact Families

The intact families were recruited from eight Sydney high schools chosen to represent a diversity of geographical and social environments. As with the Court sample, the New South Wales Department of Education specified that letters be sent from schools inviting participation. We were given only the names of those who agreed to take part. Forty-one families were randomly selected within the desired socio-economic frame from the 129 responses received (see Appendix 1). While this group must be seen as a voluntary sample, great care was taken to investigate demographic and psychometric characteristics of these families. Comparisons with published norms and with characteristics of the divorcing group sample are presented in Appendix 2, and are discussed below. The sample is regarded as highly satisfactory.

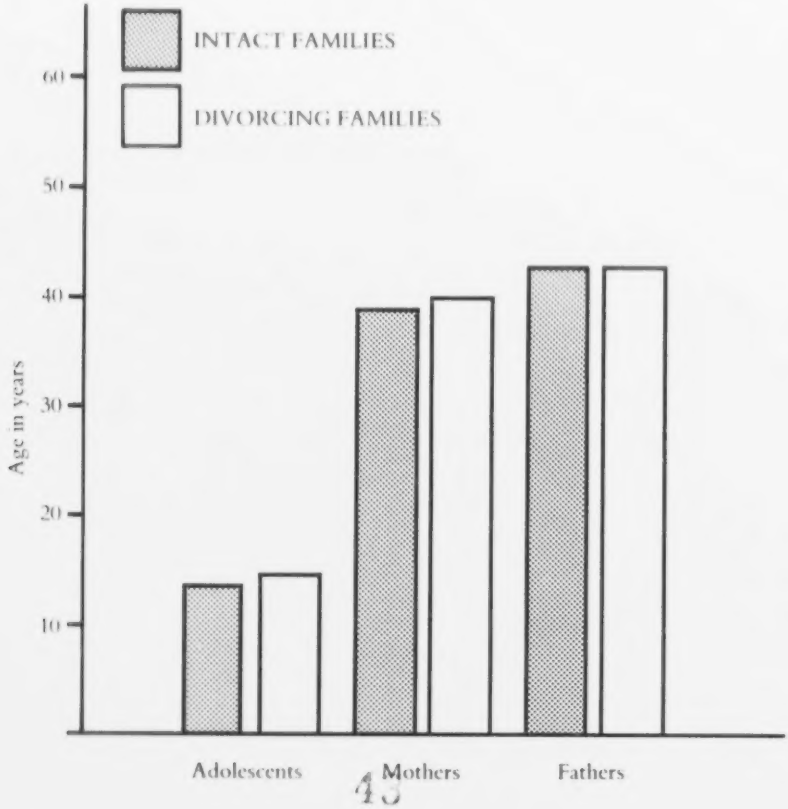
Figure 1: Father's work type (blue-collar versus white-collar) by family group



The timing of the research program necessitated that the control group families be contacted and interviewed before all members of the divorcing sample had been procured.

Since the socio-economic profile of the divorced group was not known when intact families were chosen it was decided to opt for 'middle Australia'. Fathers' occupations ranged from truck driver to professor; mothers included boutique manageress, lecturer, waitress, teacher and housewife, among many more. Merging the two upper (A and B) and the two lower (C and D) status categories of Congalton's (1969) classification of Australian occupations, the proportions of fathers' jobs included 46 per cent in the higher group, and 54 per cent in the lower. This turned out to be a happy choice as exactly the same proportions emerged from our divorced sample. The divorced group tended to have slightly more A and C type occupations than the intact families but there were no significant differences with regard to socio-economic status in the subsequent analyses.

Figure 2: Mean ages of adolescents, mothers and fathers at time of interview by family group



Timing of the research program also created a small but significant difference in adolescents' ages since the control group interviews were completed some months ahead of those of the divorcing families. The mean age at interview of the adolescents from intact families was 14.34 compared with 15 for the divorcing group. Age was accordingly controlled (as previously noted) by including it in our analysis as a covariate.

There were 19 girls and 22 boys in the intact group, and 18 girls and 19 boys among the divorced families. (In the analysis reported in the first part of this paper these numbers reduced to 17 girls and 19 boys in the divorced group: the *N* necessarily varies due to some missing data.) Two girls from divorcing families completed outcome measures but declined to be interviewed, and four OSIQ questionnaires (one intact, three divorced) contained missing data. Considerable information for these cases exists and is included where appropriate.

In choosing a sample with which to compare a research group it is necessary to ensure that the control group itself is representative of the general population and especially that it is not less well adjusted than average. We tested the intact families against population norms on the standard measures and found that mean scores indicated normal or better than normal adjustment among the adolescents (see Appendix 2 — Tables A2.2 and A2.3). Mothers' marital adjustment scores on Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976) were similar to population norms, and fathers reported higher rates of marital satisfaction than average. These marriages were significantly more affectionate, on average, than those of the Australian couples studied by Antill and Cotton (1982). Details of these results are presented in Appendix 2 and the scale is more fully described in Chapter 3.

How Well Matched are the Two Groups?

It was important that the non-divorcing families should be adequately matched with the divorcing group so that legitimate comparisons could be made. On the other hand, over-zealous matching may remove differences intrinsic to the marital situation and also to the adjustment of the child. It would be unwise, for example, to match families on the basis of current family income, for divorce is frequently accompanied by income loss and this factor may be implicated in a child's poor adjustment (Desimone-Luis, O'Mahoney and Hunt, 1979). Bronfenbrenner's 'second and third order effects' (1979), may operate in the form of demographic variables whose association with divorce is not obvious, but which may affect children either directly or indirectly through their parents.

For this reason, and also because of the size of the sample, we preferred to match our groups loosely on the basis of father's occupation, and child's sex and age. A wide range of demographic variables were measured, and 66 one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were carried out to determine

whether the groups differed with respect to any of these characteristics. These results are presented in Table 5.

We investigated whether the groups were different with respect to ages of children and their parents, number of children in the family, family living arrangements, social class, employment, economic situation, educational levels, religious affiliation and practice, country of birth, physical health of the teenager and his or her parents.

Significant differences appeared between the groups on some of these variables, so correlations between these and each of the adjustment measures were carried out. Only three of the variables which differentiated between the groups were found to be significantly related to adolescent adjustment at $p < .05$. These were: number of dependents; mother's health change; and the child's age.

These variables were therefore fitted as covariates in the initial MANOVA analyses. In this way we were able to control statistically for these effects and establish whether they were masking or creating any differences in adjustment between children from divorced and intact families. Covariates found to be non-significant were subsequently omitted.

Table 5: Comparisons of intact and divorcing families on demographic and background variables

	Individual ANOVA F values		
Family characteristics			
Length of time married	.70	First child still living at home	19.07***
Mother's age	.19	Age of second child	1.88
Father's age	.01	Sex of second child	.00
Adolescent's age	13.31**[1]	Second child still at home	9.12**
Number of children in family	.11	Age of third child	.07
Adolescent's ordinal position	.11	Sex of third child	.18
Mother's place of birth	1.14	Third child still at home	1.33
Father's place of birth	.74	Age of fourth child	.25
Mother's years in Australia	.19	Sex of fourth child	1.12
Father's years in Australia	.43	Fourth child still at home	.02
Mother's education	7.47**	Age of fifth child	.17
Father's education	.19	Sex of fifth child	.43
Age of first child	1.11	Fifth child still at home	3.00
Sex of first child	.06		
Employment			
Father's work type	2.26	Mother's work training	1.40
Mother's work type	9.53**	Is mother employed?	2.94
Mother's last work	.16		
Income and living arrangements			
Family income	15.96***	Payment for accommodation	5.56*
Mother's income	8.23**	Other persons in same house	2.85
Mother's income change in last 12 months	.40	Who else?	.15
		Length of residence	5.06*

Amount of income change in last 12 months	1.62	Number of moves	.35
Number of dependents	24.32***[1]	Place moved to	1.55
Living arrangements	1.66	Change of schools	8.18**
Religious affiliation			
Adolescent's religion	.07	Mother's religion	7.90**
Adolescent's religious attendance	.25	Mother's attendance	.52
Importance of child's religion	.04	Father's religion	8.86**
		Father's attendance	5.21*
Health			
Adolescent's health	.47	Mother's hospitalisation	2.44
Mother's health	1.39	Father's health	1.02
Change in mother's health	6.40*[1]	Change in father's health	1.17
Mother's gynaecological problems	.37	Father's medical problems	.03
Mother's medical problems	2.68	Father's surgical problems	.01
Mother's surgical problems	.56	Father's nervous problems	12.17***
Mother's nervous problems	5.06*	Father's hospitalisation	4.48*

(* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$)

Note: [1]denotes variables which show significant group differences *and* are significantly correlated with adolescent adjustment variables. These are controlled by inclusion as *covariates* in subsequent MANOVA model reduction.

All other variables significantly discriminating between the groups are regarded as *group descriptors*.

Divorced and intact families — descriptive characteristics

The two groups of families are alike in many ways. A similar proportion of parents were born in Australia. They had been married for about the same time (the mean for the intact group was 19 years, and 17 for the divorcing

Figure 3: Percentages of mothers and fathers born in Australia by family group

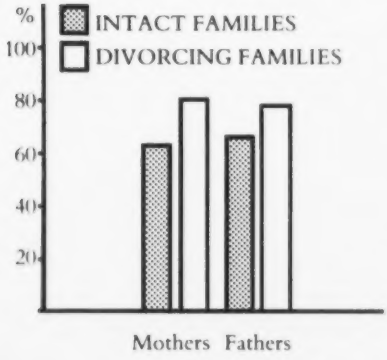


Figure 4: Percentages of families in each group by number of children

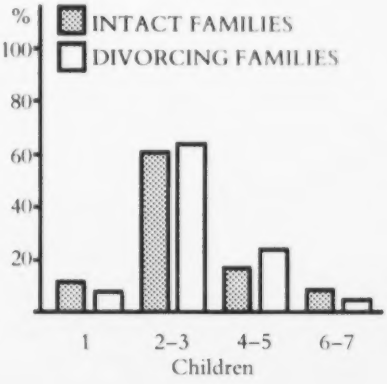


Figure 5: Percentages of families where the eldest child has left home by family group

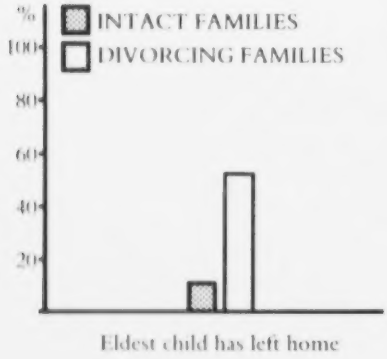
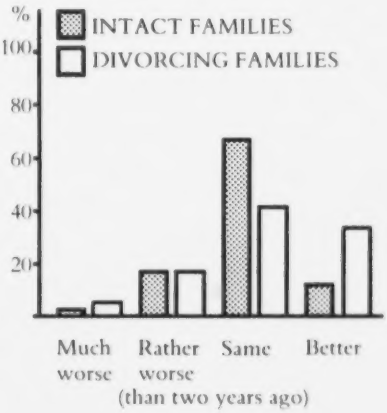


Figure 6: Mother's change in health by family group



couples) and were similar in age. Their families were alike in size and age distributions, although in more of the divorced families the oldest children had left home ($p < .0001$).

The fathers had a similar range of jobs, educational background and standard of health. More mothers from divorced than intact families reported feeling healthier than they had 12 months earlier — indicating a higher level of stress at the time of separation than the actual divorce. They tended to be better educated ($p = .008$) and to have higher status jobs ($p = .003$) than wives in intact families, a finding which may reflect two processes: on the one hand, older women who are able to support themselves adequately may be more likely to leave an unsatisfactory marriage than those who have less earning capacity; on the other, divorce may cause women to seek higher level jobs which enable them to be self-supporting.

Although no significant difference shows in church attendance among the mothers, fewer divorced fathers ($p = .004$) and mothers ($p = .006$) had any religious affiliation, compared with the intact group. There were no differences, however, in the teenagers' churchgoing patterns, nor in the proportion of parents who placed importance on some kind of religious background for their children.

Table 6 shows a number of differences between the two groups of families concerning living and income arrangements. As might be expected, there is a higher proportion of divorced families in the lower income brackets ($\chi^2 = 15.8$; d.f. = 6; $p < .025$). However, fewer family members depended on this income ($p < .0001$). Property settlements had not been made in most instances and the figures have to be treated with some caution

Figure 7: Mother's education by family group

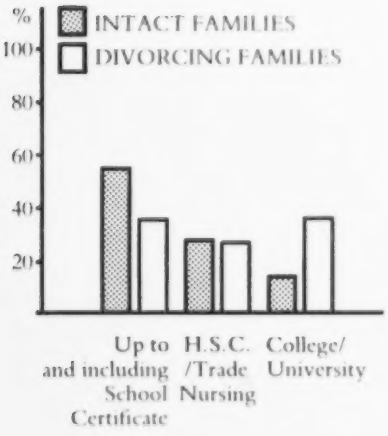
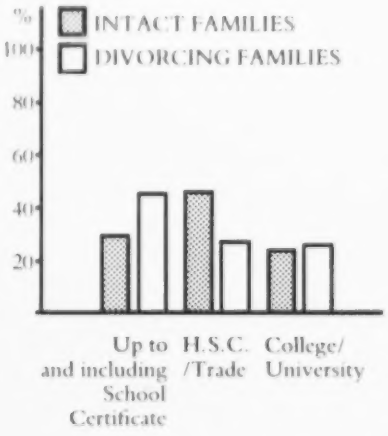


Figure 8: Father's education by family group



because each partner's 'total family income' may not have become clearly established by the time of the interviews. Anxiety existed about the outcome of property negotiations, especially where valuable assets were at stake. Many parents expressed concern about financial difficulties, and there were some cases of considerable hardship.

Table 6: Total family income: intact families and custodial mothers and fathers by income category

	< $9000	$9000–$14 999	$15 000–$21 000	> $21 000	Total
Intact families	1 (2.4%)	6 (14.6%)	10 (24.4%)	24 (58.6%)	41
Custodial mothers	7 (25.9%)	3 (11.1%)	5 (18.5%)	12 (44.4%)	27
Custodial fathers	0 (0%)	4 (40%)	3 (30%)	3 (30%)	10

Many mothers, and some fathers, were still living in the family home. High mortgage payments were a considerable burden in some families where income might appear to be adequate but where liquidity was, in fact, restricted by heavy recurrent expenses. Accommodation costs were hard to translate into real income estimates in this small sample. In some households new partners were contributing in informal ways to family expenditure.

A number of middle-aged women acknowledged having experienced unexpected satisfaction in re-entering the workforce when so forced by the breakdown of their marriages. Despite some initial problems in finding jobs, they do not seem to have found the current unemployment situation an insuperable barrier. Some mothers had prepared themselves for re-entry to the workforce by upgrading their educational qualifications. Many found companionship and support and a new sense of competence and self-esteem in their jobs. There were some compensations, therefore, for the economic insecurity that many had experienced.

Financial uncertainty was a back-drop to the lives of many of the teenagers from divorcing families — they expressed awareness of their changed situation and anxiety about the future. However, there were no significant correlations between adolescent adjustment scores and measures of family income or income change.

Summary

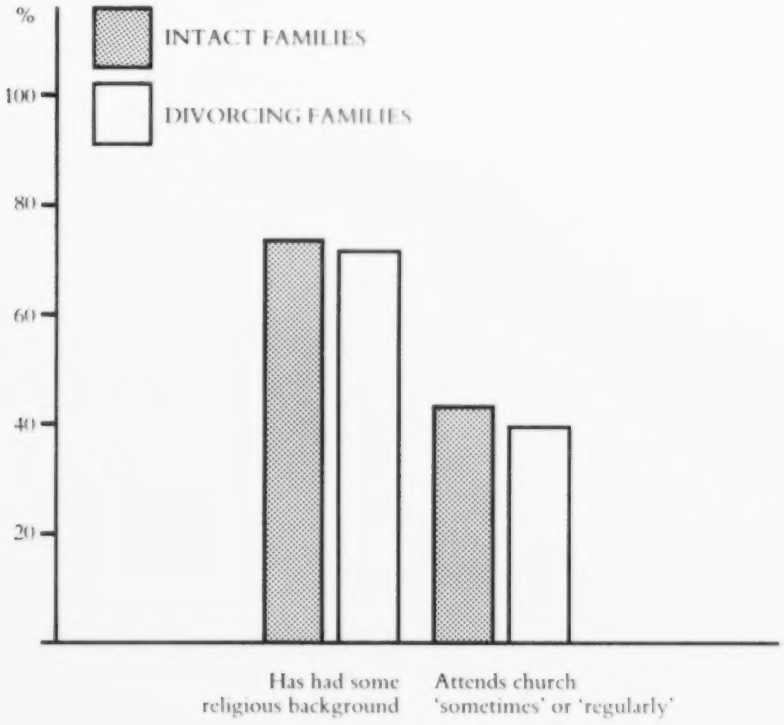
The sample analysis indicates success in reaching a wide cross-section of divorcing families. No evidence suggests that the group over-represents the 'easy' divorce.

The sample is largely composed of 'middle' Australians and somewhat under-represents the lowest income groups, although slightly more than half of the fathers have working class occupations.

The divorcing families and the non-divorcing families are strikingly similar in a whole range of demographic variables.

Both groups of families were enlisted from broadly based populations (court clients and high school students). Consent to participate depended upon the willingness of the adolescent and preferably both parents to be interviewed. While this may have affected the composition of the sample to some degree, it has enabled examination in fine detail of the inter-relationship of family processes and adolescent adjustment.

Figure 9: Adolescents' churchgoing patterns by family group



3
RESEARCH DESIGN

Much early research on the effect of divorce on children was marred by poor design, although more sophisticated methods were adopted as evidence accumulated about the complex nature of the problem. For the present study we adopted a method combining the qualitative strengths of a case history approach with measurements which can be subjected to statistical analysis. We therefore designed comprehensive semi-structured interviews for both adolescents and parents. We also included a number of standard measures which allow comparison of our findings with population norms and with the results of other studies.

The Interviews

The interviews provided demographic information and recorded many facets of family life.

Parents from both intact and divorcing families were asked about their view of family relationships including conflict, family alliances, discipline, rules and family activities. They were asked to comment on their teenager's interests, school and social adjustment and personal characteristics. They also talked of their own sources of social support and methods of coping with stress. In addition, divorcing parents were asked about the circumstances of the divorce and their view of its impact on their adolescent. Parents from both intact and separated families were encouraged to tell us in their own words what they felt was needed in the way of support and facilities for adolescents.

Adolescents were seen separately by an interviewer who had not talked with either parent. This was so that interviewers' perceptions could be recorded without prior expectations, and so that teenagers could see their participation as independent of their parents. It was considered important to gain the teenagers' views as accurately as possible as prior research (Emery, 1982) indicates that parents' perceptions of their children's adjustment may

be coloured by their own depression or by unconscious denial of negative reactions.

The adolescents' interview covered areas similar to that of their parents, and sought to build up a picture of their world of family relationships, friends, school and leisure activities, problems, opinions, hopes for the future and level of maturity. Teenagers from separated families told us about their experience of the divorce: they were also asked what advice they would give to other parents and teenagers in similar circumstances.

Male and female psychology graduates of varying ages carried out the interviews which took place in people's homes, except where respondents preferred to visit us at Macquarie University.

Adult interviews lasted two to three hours, and those of teenagers about one and a half hours. Adults and adolescents from divorced families often spoke to us for considerably longer. This time did not include the completing of measures, except in the case of parents from intact families, where one person would fill out tests while the other spoke to the interviewer about the more sensitive aspects of family relations. Parents alternated in this section of the interview, but were otherwise interviewed together. Divorced parents were interviewed separately. Teenage measures and those of divorced parents were left by the first interviewer and collected by the next, or posted to us by the parent.

The experience of visiting these families in their homes and talking with them in a relaxed and informal way provided us with a rare opportunity to gain insight into the lives of both parents and teenagers. Especially among the divorced families, much was discussed after the official interview was ended — over a late-night cup of tea or coffee. (Relevant sections of the interview schedules are included in Appendix 5.)

Standard Measures

Studies of adolescence show that adjustment is a many-sided process, particularly at this period of a child's life. Measures were chosen which we believed would provide a well-rounded picture of the adolescent. The standard measures allow us to compare teenagers from the two groups of families with each other, and also to assess our findings in the light of other published studies. In this way we can obtain a base-line from which to evaluate the level of adjustment of the adolescents from divorcing families.

The Offer Self Image Questionnaire (OSIQ) (Offer, Ostrov and Howard, 1977a, 1982), the Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire (NSQ) (Scheier and Cattell, 1961) and the Langner psychiatric symptom screening measure (Langner, 1962) together provide information about normal patterns of development, and also levels of anxiety and depression. These measures are included as outcome variables in our analyses. Because of indications in the recent divorce literature that the quality of relationships between children and their parents may mediate the effects of family dis-

turbance, we wanted to include a measure of the adolescents' perception of their parents. The Parent Bonding Inventory (PBI) (Parker, Tupling and Brown, 1979; Parker, 1983) provides scales that show how teenagers view their parents in terms of 'care' and 'overprotection'.

To gain an indication of the level of marital adjustment of parents in the non-divorcing families, Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976) was administered. Parents also filled out the Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire and Langner measures.

Comparisons of the present sample with published norms showed that the intact families fell within the normal range, or performed somewhat better than normal, on all the standard measures (see Appendix 2).

The Offer Self Image Questionnaire

As our main adjustment measure for adolescents we chose the Offer Self Image Questionnaire (OSIQ) (Offer, Ostrov and Howard, 1977a; 1982) — a measure of self-concept consisting of 130 statements which subjects rate on a six-point scale from 'describes me very well' to 'does not describe me at all'.

This instrument was developed by Daniel Offer of the University of Chicago and his colleagues in 1962 and has been used widely in research with normal and disturbed adolescents. Cross-cultural studies have also been carried out, comparing teenage groups from Ireland, Israel, the United States of America and Australia (Offer, Ostrov and Howard, 1977a, b; 1981). Offer sees normal adolescent development as a multi-dimensional process — a child may be well-adjusted in one area while he or she functions less well in another. The OSIQ allows plotting of this variability as it measures the feelings and attitudes teenagers have about themselves in 11 different areas of functioning. These can be grouped under five main aspects of the self.

The psychological self

- The 'impulse control' scale measures the adolescent's ability to cope with his or her impulses — to ward off internal and external pressures.
- 'Emotional tone' assesses the person's emotional stability.
- 'Body and self-image' examines the extent to which the youngster feels at ease with his or her body and bodily changes occurring at this time.

The social self

- The 'social relationships' scale explores the adolescent's relationships with other people and his or her friendship patterns.
- 'Morals' measures the development of conscience, responsibility and concern for others.
- 'Vocational and educational goals' indicates the degree to which the adolescent is coping with the task of orienting him or herself towards the future.

The sexual self

- The 'sexual attitudes' scale examines the adolescent's feelings, attitudes and behaviour towards the opposite sex, and openness towards his or her own sexuality.

The familial self

- The 'family relationships' scale measures relationships between the adolescent and his or her parents, and the emotional atmosphere within the home.

The coping self

- 'Mastery of the external world' indicates how well the adolescent can deal with his or her environment.
- 'Psychopathology' picks up overt psychopathological symptoms.
- 'Superior adjustment' measures how well the adolescent copes with him or herself, with other people, and with the world. It can be seen as a measure of ego strength or coping ability.

As well as the 11 sub-scales, a *total score* can be derived. Offer describes this as measuring psychological well-being and adjustment.

The validity and reliability of the OSIQ as reported by Offer, Ostrov and Howard (1981) appear to be satisfactory. It has been found to discriminate well between normal and disturbed youngsters. Some cultural differences have emerged, but by and large there is remarkable consistency across the adolescents from the four different countries that have been compared. The main appeal of the OSIQ is its ability to differentiate between dimensions of adjustment especially relevant to adolescence, thus making it a flexible and thorough measure. The existence of Australian norms based on a sample of 1350 adolescents also makes this test particularly appropriate.

In the present analyses raw scores are used rather than the standard scores which have been more recently developed (Offer, Ostrov and Howard, 1982), for better comparison with the earlier Australian results.

The Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire

The Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire (NSQ) is a well-known instrument developed for the Institute for Personality and Ability Testing by Scheier and Cattell (1961). It is brief, suitable for use with both adults and adolescents from the age of 13 onwards, and has been extensively tested for reliability and validity.

The NSQ measures neurotic tendency. It contains scales which examine four aspects of functioning found by empirical means to be independent of each other. These are *sensitivity*, *depression*, *submissiveness* and *anxiety*. It also provides a total neuroticism score. The scale was designed to indicate aspects of adjustment among normal people, as well as to identify those with significant neurotic disturbance.

The Langner Twenty-two Item Screening Scale

This measure is a brief psychiatric screening device developed by Thomas Langner (1962) of Cornell University to identify people suffering from mild or more serious psychiatric disorders. It is a useful guide to the level of psychiatric disturbance in a population, but should be used in conjunction with more sensitive measures (or clinical investigation) in individual cases. Langner suggests a cutting point of four symptoms will identify 84.4 per cent of the incapacitated members of a population, but only one per cent of the psychologically healthy. A more stringent level of seven symptoms eliminates most of those that are only mildly affected, but identifies over half of the seriously disturbed.

This measure was used successfully by Hennessy, Bruen and Cullen (1973) in their Canberra mental health survey which included an examination of the mental health of adolescents (Hennessy and Bruen, 1973). It was included in the present study as an adjunct to other measures of psychopathology.

The Parent Bonding Inventory

The Parent Bonding Inventory (PBI) is an Australian measure developed by Parker, Tupling and Brown (1979) as a tool for investigating psychiatric patients' retrospective reports of their relationships with their parents. Parker (1979) found an association between neurotic depression in adults and reports of their parents as having been more overprotective and less caring than the parents of normal controls. In a series of studies, Parker (1981) sought to show that the measure taps actual parental characteristics and is not influenced by features intrinsic to the subject. He was able to demonstrate the validity of the PBI by showing that depressed patients' ratings of their parents were highly correlated with ratings made by their non-depressive siblings and also by mothers rating their own behaviour.

The PBI consists of 25 statements rated by the subject on a four-point scale from 'very like' to 'very unlike' his or her mother or father. The items are counter-balanced and make up two scales measuring *care* and *overprotection*. The care scale consists of items tapping warmth, understanding and acceptance, while overprotection includes dimensions of control, intrusiveness and encouragement of dependence. Surveys of populations of normal and depressed adults indicate that certain combinations of these traits provide patterns of bonding that are favourable or damaging. Parker found that optimal bonding occurs when subjects rate their parents as high in care and low in overprotection. The reverse pattern (low care and high overprotection) is associated with a whole range of negative outcomes.

In this study, the Parent Bonding Inventory was used somewhat differently in that adolescent subjects were asked how they saw their parents at the time of interview rather than retrospectively. We were interested in the current perceptions of subjects and the relationship between parental care and overprotection and present adolescent adjustment.

These scales are of interest because they tap aspects of parent–child relationships which are particularly relevant to adolescence. As the teenager prepares to enter the adult world a caring but not overprotective parent can provide encouragement and support, while a parent who clings to the child, or uses him or her as an emotional substitute for a failed marital relationship, may make the child's task very difficult.

The Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976) is a carefully designed and well tested measure for assessing the quality of marital relationships. It consists of 32 items which tap four main aspects of a relationship, and also provide a total adjustment score. The sub-scales examine *satisfaction*, *cohesion*, *consensus*, and *affection*.

This scale has been widely used overseas and also in Australian studies. Confirmatory factor analyses by Spanier and Thompson (1982) and Antill and Cotton (1982) endorse its usefulness; Antill and Cotton recommend the scale's use for Australian samples, as do Sharpley and Cross (1982) who found its main strength to lie in its overall adjustment dimension.

We used the scale to establish the compatibility of parents in the intact group and to see how they compared with other Australian couples.

Eggs in a Basket and Family Sculpture

Two further measures were incorporated into the interviews. These have not yet been subjected to a full statistical analysis, but the information they provide is examined for the individual case histories in this study.

The first is *Eggs in a Basket*, a measure developed by Sydney therapist Margaret Topham (personal communication) for use in family counselling. We have adapted it to measure the adolescent's investment of him or herself within and beyond the family.

Each teenager was given 12 marbles (in place of the eggs used by Topham) and a set of four baskets labelled 'mother', 'father', 'brothers/sisters', and 'self'. The adolescent was asked to distribute the marbles in the baskets so as to show 'how much of yourself you give to your mother, your father and the rest of the family, and how much you keep for yourself and your interests and friends outside the family'. The sibling basket was then removed and the procedure was repeated for the three remaining baskets. The number of 'eggs' retained was seen as a guide to the degree of differentiation from the family that had taken place. The normal developmental process involves separation from the family and orientation to the outside world in adolescence, and we wished to see whether divorce affects this process.

The adolescents had no difficulty in grasping the rather abstract concept of 'investment of self' implied by this task, and enjoyed the variety that it added to the interview.

Family Sculpture

The second measure is *Family Sculpture*. To gain a multi-faceted view of different members' perceptions of the family, and also to provide a concrete demonstration to clarify interview material, parents and adolescents were asked independently to construct a family sculpture. This procedure was adapted from Kveback's Norwegian test (Cromwell, Fournier and Kveback, 1981).

Subjects were given abstract wooden figures representing father, mother, adolescent and other significant family figures and asked to arrange these on a chess-board to show 'how close you feel to each one, and how close they feel to one another'. The figures have a face on one side so that the subject is able to position figures facing or turned away from one another.

Information can be quantified by using the chess-board squares to estimate distances between family members, or it can be used as a qualitative demonstration of family alignments. Congruity between different people's perceptions of family relationships can also be examined. We plan to carry

out a detailed analysis of this material, but in the meantime find it useful as an adjunct to the case histories.

Summary

Our emphasis is on the adolescents' experience of their parents' divorce, and we present a view derived from adolescents' own perceptions of their families, the changes that have occurred in their lives, their emotional responses, and their assessment and acceptance of the divorce of their parents.

We have chosen outcome measures which are consistent with this approach in that they are derived from self-report tests. We believe with Offer, Ostrov and Howard (1981) that 'the psychological sensitivity of the adolescent is sufficiently acute to provide valid self-description' (p.31). In addition, the standard tests have been well validated in studies with normal and disturbed populations. These have shown that the sub-scales embedded in them are sensitive to differences in psychological adjustment established by independent means.

Because of the large amount of data collected, the report concentrates on examining the results of the standard tests and relating these to background variables and to the teenagers' experience as revealed through their interviews. Demographic information and a measure of parents' appraisal of their adolescents are obtained from parent interviews.

4

ADOLESCENT ADJUSTMENT: COMPARISON OF INTACT AND DIVORCING FAMILIES

Analysis Strategy

In the first part of this report we set out the results of the statistical analysis. In the second part we turn to the interview material to help us to interpret these results, and to look for more subtle effects that may emerge from a qualitative analysis of case histories.

The main questions that we want to answer in the following chapters are as follows:

1 Are the adolescents from divorcing families less well-adjusted psychologically than those from non-divorcing families?

2 Are similar family processes associated with adjustment in both groups of families?

3 What special factors are associated with adjustment among the adolescents from divorcing families?

4 Does parental divorce at adolescence affect the developmental progress of children?

5 To what extent do boys and girls differ with respect to the above questions?

6 Using a measure of adjustment based on parental appraisal, are there differences between boys and girls from intact and divorcing families?

The present chapter reports the results of the main comparison of the psychological adjustment of the two groups of adolescents by group and sex. Family processes in both groups are examined in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 contains an analysis of factors affecting adjustment among the divorcing group only. The maturity analysis is presented in Chapter 7, and parents' views of their adolescents' adjustment are analysed in Chapter 8.

Measuring Adolescent Adjustment

Divorce is a complex phenomenon and adolescent adjustment has many aspects. Multivariate analysis of variance (SPSS, 1983) is our main analytic tool, the advantage of MANOVA being that it permits examination of a number of outcome variables simultaneously. It can first be established whether there are differences in global adjustment between boys and girls from intact and separated homes. Then particular aspects of adjustment can be examined by inspecting univariate relationships, that is, the relationship between a single dependent variable and several explanatory variables.

Variables which may obscure the relationship being examined may be statistically controlled by fitting them as covariates in the multivariate analysis. Examination of covariates can tell us to what extent these variables have contributed to the observed differences in the relevant outcomes.

The present analyses are based on standard measures of 13 aspects of adolescent adjustment. These measures, described in detail in the previous chapter, are: the Offer Self Image Questionnaire (OSIQ), adopted as the principal outcome measure, which contains 11 sub-scales describing five dimensions of the self — psychological, social, sexual, familial and coping; and two measures of psychological health — the Langner 22-item screening score of psychiatric symptoms, and the Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire (NSQ). Lower scores on all scales denote better adjustment.

Together these measures provide a comprehensive picture of adjustment, but it is also useful to examine each of the 13 aspects separately. Adolescent development does not always proceed evenly on all fronts — divorce may affect some aspects of adjustment in different ways and boys and girls may experience its effects in different areas of functioning.

Analysis of demographic variables was described in Chapter 2. Those variables found to differentiate between the intact and divorcing families were correlated with adolescent adjustment scores to identify any uncontrolled differences between the groups which might obscure the results of the main analysis.

Three variables were found to be related to adjustment — number of dependents, mother's health change, and age of child (see Table 5). These variables were therefore included in the first stages of the subsequent analysis, thereby controlling statistically for their possible influence. When

Table 7: Multivariate significance table: adolescent adjustment in intact and divorcing families

	F	d.f.	P
Group	.987	(13,57)	.476
Sex	2.094	(13,57)	.029
Group × Sex interaction	.536	(13,57)	.892

included in the multivariate analysis, none contributed significantly to either group or sex differences ($p > .05$), so all except age were dropped from the analysis.

Are Adolescents from Divorcing Families Less Well Adjusted than those from Non-divorcing Families?

Our broad hypothesis is that the structure of the family (that is, whether parents are divorced or together) will not of itself predict adolescent adjustment, but that adjustment will depend on processes within the family. The present analysis examines the first part of this hypothesis with the aim of determining whether there are significant differences in adjustment between adolescents from intact and divorcing families; a second purpose is to see whether the adjustment of boys differs from that of girls.

A MANOVA was therefore performed including all 13 adjustment measures as outcome variables. Group (intact or divorcing) and sex were the predictor variables, and age was included as a covariate.

Table 7 shows that there are no significant differences in adjustment between adolescents from intact and divorcing families, calling into question the widespread assumption that adolescents from broken homes, as a group, are more disturbed than those from intact families. When family structure is disregarded, and both groups are combined, adolescent boys are significantly better adjusted than adolescent girls ($p = .029$).

The univariate relationships reveal that the overall significant sex difference resulted from small differences on several measures, none of which was individually significant at the .01 alpha level adopted for these multiple comparisons.* The main sources of sex difference lie in the Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire ($p = .027$), the Langner Psychiatric Screening test ($p = .034$) and the OSIQ Sexual Attitudes Scale ($p = .04$). (See Chapter 3 for further discussion and Appendix 2 for details of sex and group scores.)

The precaution had been taken of including age as a covariate in order to control statistically in case there were any age-related differences between the groups. No significant relationships were found between any of the adjustment measures and the adolescents' age. Only the sexual attitudes scale showed a non-significant trend for younger adolescents to be less mature.

These results confirm that our sampling and measurement procedures are

* Where multiple comparisons are made, a stringent significance level is adopted in the analyses reported in this paper. In this we follow the significance test procedure of Bonferroni (Miller, 1966) to guard against the possibility of results reaching significance by chance when the number of comparisons is large. For each step the significance level adopted is determined by the number of comparisons made.

correctly reflecting known population characteristics (see below). They therefore give further weight to our main finding that on a range of well-validated measures of the central aspects of adolescent adjustment we have found no differences between children of divorced and intact families sufficient to meet statistical significance.

Interpretation of results

Group comparison

The finding that there are no differences in psychological adjustment between the two groups of teenagers should not be taken as meaning that there are no disturbed children among these families. The distribution of well-adjusted and more disturbed adolescents in each group is similar. Among adolescents in our sample there is no greater probability that a child from a divorcing family will be psychologically maladjusted than one from an intact home.

These results do not mean that adolescents are untouched by their parents' divorce. Family break-up is a confusing and sad experience for many youngsters and adaptation takes time. But mourning is not a sign of maladjustment, and gains occur as well as losses.

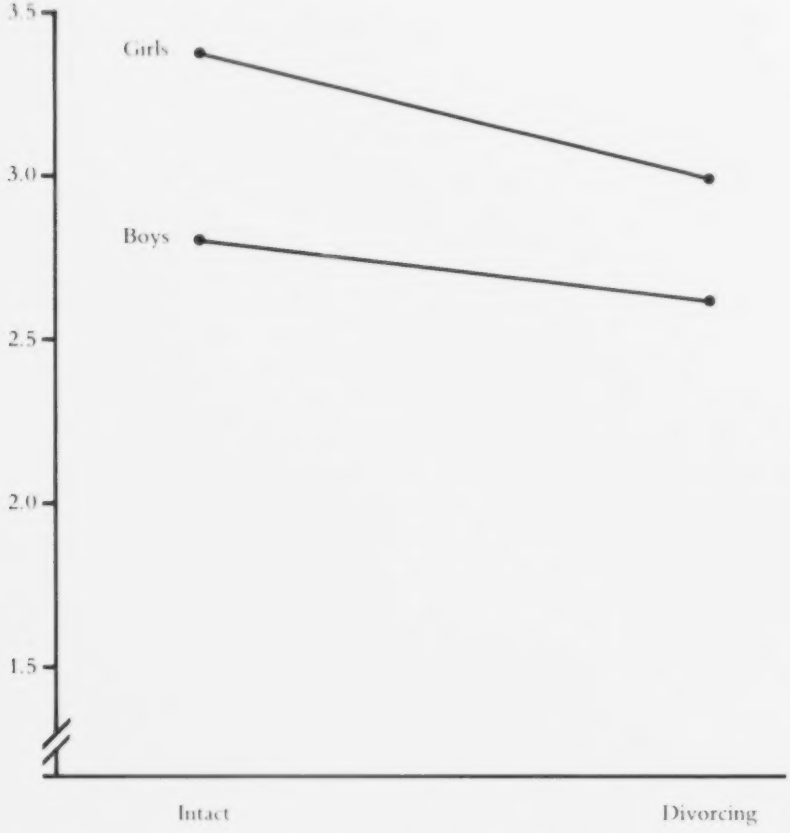
These results show that it is dangerous to generalise to a wider population of children of divorce the results of studying clinical cases or other groups of teenagers already defined as 'problems'. They also suggest that the popular stereotype of the maladjusted teenager from the broken home may be doing an injustice to the many youngsters who cope with this major life event with remarkable resilience and courage. Perpetuation of this stereotype may be creating harmful expectations among teachers and others who deal with adolescents, and may also create unnecessary distress to parents and to adolescents themselves.

Differences between boys and girls

The main finding that adolescent boys, irrespective of family group, are better adjusted than girls, results from small but consistent differences across many of the adjustment measures. The sexual attitudes scale contributes to this result but is thought to represent a commonly found sex difference rather than poorer psychosexual adjustment. Offer, Ostrov and Howard (1981) report that younger adolescent boys seem to be more open to their sexuality than same-aged girls as evidenced by their higher endorsement of items tapping pleasure in sexuality, enjoyment of sexual jokes and frequent thoughts about sex (p.151).

Figure 10 illustrates the difference found between boys and girls of both groups on this scale. It also shows that the girls from non-divorcing families are the least sexually advanced. Norm comparisons provided in Appendix 2 show that the girls from the intact families may be at the lower end of the normal range on this scale: there are no indications that the girls or boys from divorcing families are any different in this respect from average Australian teenagers.

Figure 10: Offer Self-Image: sexual attitudes scale by family group: mean scores for boys and girls



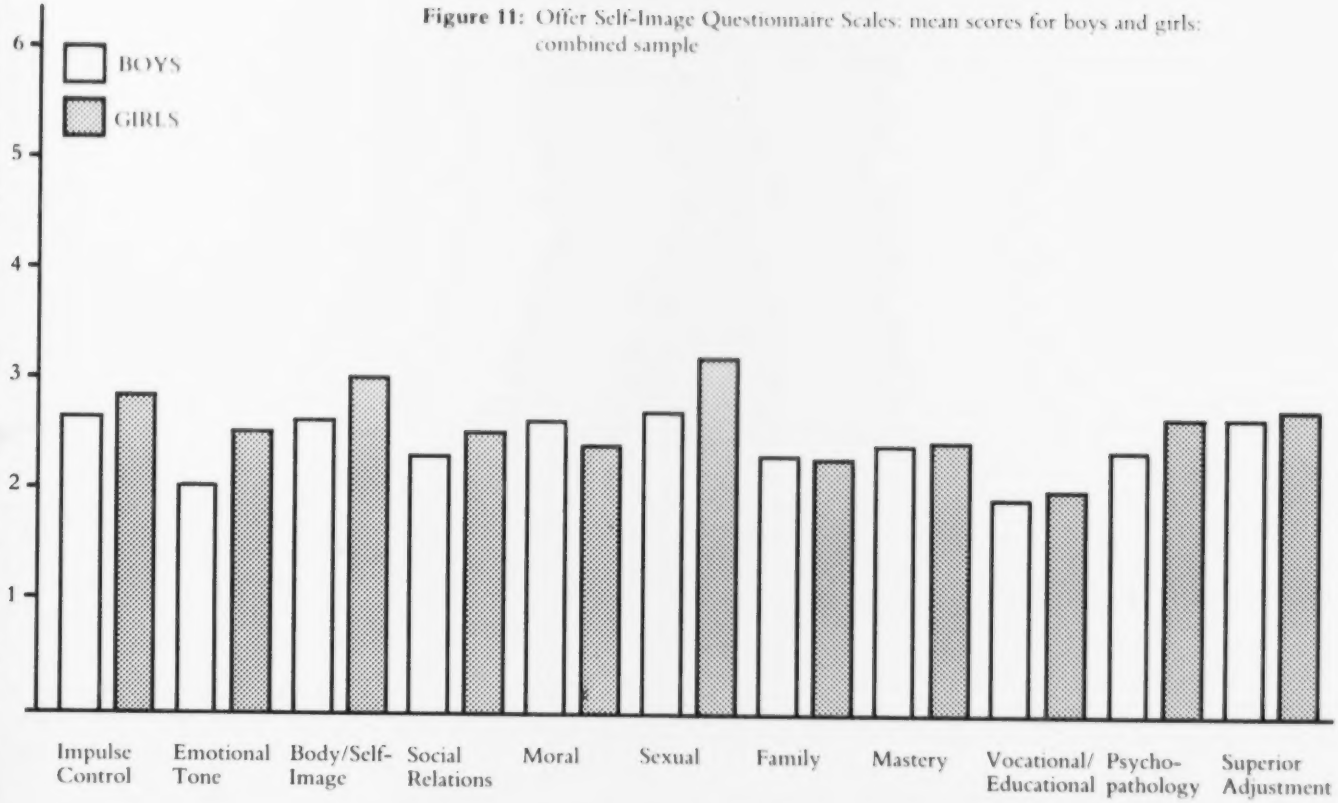
Note: Scores on all scales are keyed so that the lower the score the better the adjustment.

Sexual behaviour as distinct from sexual attitudes is examined in Chapter 7 and found to be related to age rather than family group. It appears that divorce is not associated with sexual precocity among the adolescents in our sample — a concern expressed by some writers (Hetherington, 1972; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980).

Although the sexual attitudes scale may represent psychosexual developmental differences rather than poorer adjustment, there is a consistent trend for boys to score better than girls on other adjustment measures, as can be seen from Figures 11, 12 and 13.

Scores on the psychoneurotic measures (NSQ and Langner) point to the recognised shift towards rather greater anxiety among females than males as

Figure 11: Offer Self-Image Questionnaire Scales: mean scores for boys and girls: combined sample



they approach adulthood. Rutter (1980), for example, notes that the rate of neurotic disturbance tends to increase as girls grow older, while it decreases among boys. Offer, Ostrov and Howard (1981) found sex differences in emotional aspects of the psychological self consistently favouring boys. They suggest this may reflect the continuing strength of traditional sex-roles in modern Western society. As children reach adolescence male esteem and status are enhanced, while girls become more anxious and aware of limits to their aspirations.

Since boys have often been found to be more adversely affected by family disturbance than girls in studies of younger children (Rutter, 1974; Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 1979; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980; Kurdek and Berg, 1983), an interaction between family status and sex of child had been considered likely. Studies of younger boys suggest that where a father leaves the home a son may experience his absence as rejection. He loses a male role model and companion, and as the mother becomes head of the family, discipline problems may ensue. The absence of a significant interaction effect in our data seems to indicate that these effects are less salient for adolescents, perhaps because of access to male peer groups and adult role models beyond the family. Kurdek, Blisk and Siesky (1981) also reported no sex differences among older children of divorce.

It is worth noting, however, that there is a non-significant trend for boys from divorcing families to score less well than other boys on the NSQ and Langner measures (Figures 14 and 15). On the Langner scale girls show the opposite trend. While these are only straws in the wind, one might speculate that girls may react rather differently from boys to the sex-role change

Figure 12: Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire: mean scores for boys and girls: combined sample

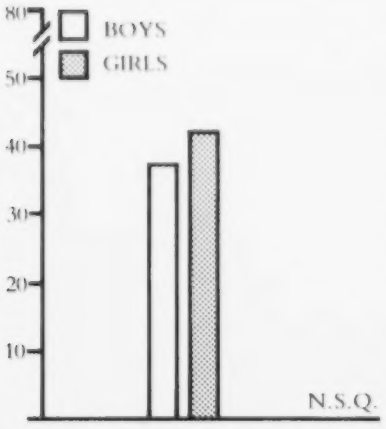
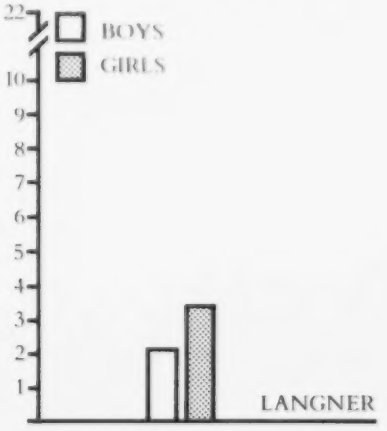


Figure 13: Langner Psychiatric Screening Scale: mean scores for boys and girls: combined sample



that occurs in a mother-headed family, while esteem may also be high when an adolescent girl's domestic skills are needed in a family where the father is custodial parent. (As reported in Chapter 6, we found the sex of the custodial parent made no difference to adolescent adjustment.)

Figure 14: Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire: mean scores for boys and girls by family group

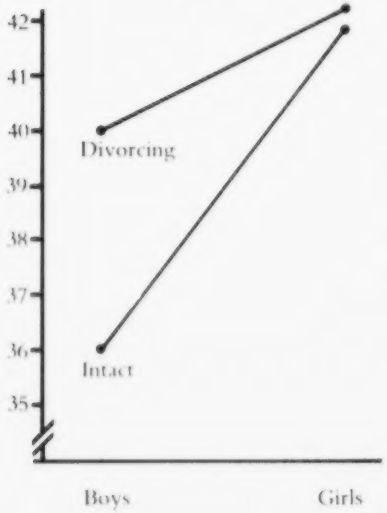
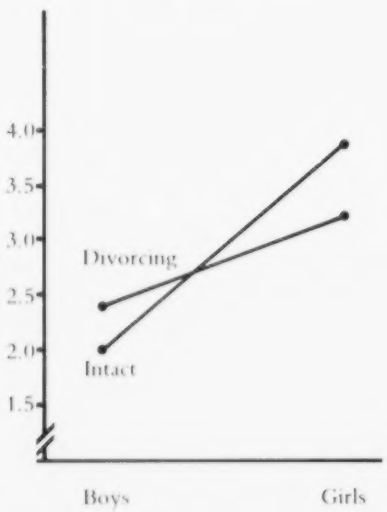


Figure 15: Langner Psychiatric Screening Scale: mean scores for boys and girls by family group



Other non-significant trends

While one should not place too much emphasis on non-significant results, the patterns and trends which are revealed in a body of data can be useful indicators of relationships which may echo the findings of other researchers, or may point to areas requiring closer examination.

The Offer Self-Image Questionnaire

Plots of the means of the OSIQ scales reveal patterns which are very similar to those reported by Offer and others for their cross-cultural and American samples. Some trends are of interest.

The psychological self Scales comprising this aspect of the self show little difference between the groups for boys although Figure 16 shows that girls from divorcing families report less satisfaction with their body and self-image than girls from intact families. There is evidence that a girl's relationship with her father plays a part in her femininity and that this is especially the case at adolescence (Hetherington, 1972). A father's indifference or estrangement may affect a girl's image of herself and account for these results.

The social self Offer reports that girls have higher moral, work and educational values than boys. Our sample trend echoes this result for moral values, but Figure 17 indicates a tendency for girls in divorcing families to have rather lower educational and vocational aspirations than other boys and girls, perhaps a realistic reflection of how increased financial pressures may affect girls in single-parent homes.

Figure 16: Offer Self-Image Questionnaire: body and self-image scale: mean scores for boys and girls by family group

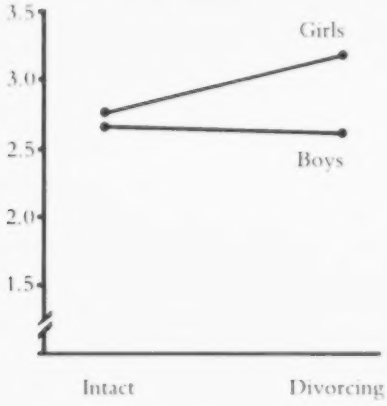
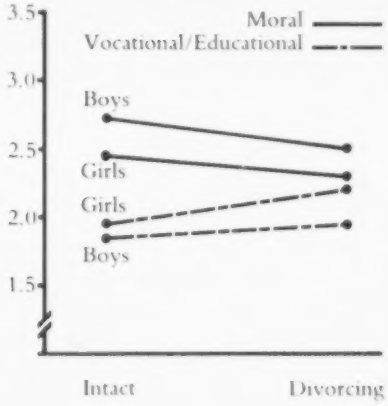


Figure 17: Offer Self-Image Questionnaire: moral and vocational/education scale: mean scores for boys and girls by family group



The familial self Figure 18 plots means on the family relations scale. Contrary to our expectation, there is no significant difference in family adjustment between teenagers from divorced and intact families. This was a surprising result so we looked more closely at individual items making up this scale. Naturally, there was a large group difference on the item 'parents do not get on together', endorsed by only 17 per cent of the intact family adolescents. More divorced group teenagers also reported preferring one parent to the other (47 per cent versus 15 per cent).

There were, however, a number of plusses for the divorced group. More felt that their parents understood them (82.4 per cent versus 60 per cent), that they did not feel they were a bother at home (85.3 per cent versus 65.0 per cent), that their parents were satisfied with them (91.2 per cent versus 80.0 per cent) and would be proud of them in the future (83.3 per cent versus 75.5 per cent). More from the divorced group also reported taking part in family discussion (82.4 per cent versus 70 per cent). Both groups of adolescents overwhelmingly felt positively about their mothers (90.0 per cent and 94.0 per cent), although only 67.6 per cent from divorced families and 77.5 per cent from intact families felt the same about their fathers.

These results seem to indicate a pattern to be looked at more closely when examining the case histories. It appears that for many of these teenagers family disruption is cushioned by having a good relationship with at least one parent, and under these circumstances adolescents can understand and accommodate changes in family structure without feeling that the family itself has disintegrated. Independence struggles, which to some degree affect most teenagers, may also come to an earlier resolution in families

where the adolescent takes on a more responsible role because of divorce.

The coping self Offer reports no significant sex differences on the scales which comprise the coping self, except that younger adolescent girls are usually less well-adjusted on the psychopathology scale. The means plotted in Figure 19 echo Offer's results and underline our overall finding that adolescent girls are rather less well-adjusted than boys.

Summary

Overall, teenagers from divorcing families do not differ significantly in adjustment from those whose parents are together, and mean scores for both family groups are well within the normal range of scores for adolescents. This is encouraging. It is a tribute to the coping ability of these youngsters and does not support the pessimistic view that is so prevalent. On the other hand, it would be naive to interpret this as meaning that there were no effects from such a major life event.

Our initial hypothesis was that adolescent adjustment would be associated with processes within the family rather than its intact or separated structure. The present analysis has supported this, in that family structure of itself has not been found to predict a child's level of adjustment. In the next chapter we look more closely at processes within both types of families.

Figure 18: Offer Self-Image Questionnaire: family relations scale: mean scores for boys and girls by family group

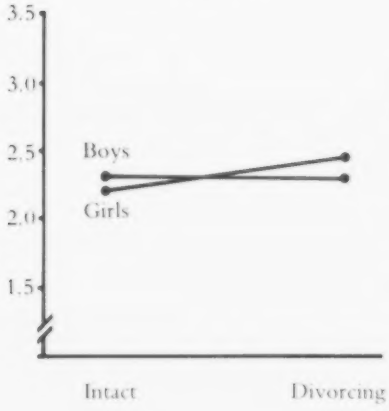
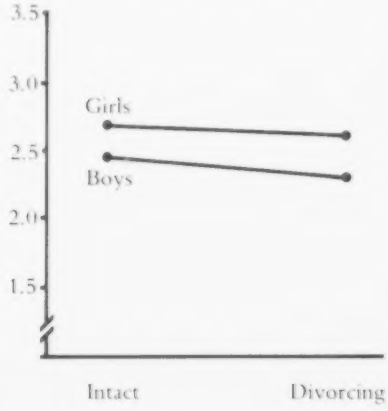


Figure 19: Offer Self-Image Questionnaire: psychopathology scale: mean scores for boys and girls by family group



5

FAMILY PROCESSES AND ADJUSTMENT

In the previous chapter we reported that no differences in adjustment were found between adolescents from divorcing and non-divorcing families. We now turn to the question regarded by Marotz-Baden, Adams, Bueche, Munro and Munro (1979) as the essential issue. To what extent are processes within the family associated with adolescent adjustment, and do these processes operate in similar ways irrespective of family form?

Since the early literature comparing children's adjustment in terms of whether or not families were 'broken', there has been increasing recognition of the need to look more closely at relationships and modes of interacting within families. Nye's classic study (1957) showed parental conflict was linked to children's adjustment, whether the family was intact or separated. Adolescents from intact, unhappy homes fared worse than those whose parents had separated. Since then the link between child disturbance and exposure to high levels of conflict between parents has been well established (see Chapter 1). Less research attention has been paid to parent–child relationships in conflicted families, although Rutter (1971) has shown that a good relationship with at least one parent can act as a buffer in an unhappy home.

The general literature suggests that a warm but non-overcontrolling relationship is the optimal one for adolescents (Baumrind, 1968). In the clinical literature, Anthony (1974b) suggests that a caring parent who also encourages a child's autonomy can enhance the development of coping skills which make the child less vulnerable to stress. Using the Parent Bonding

Table 8: Frequency distribution of family happiness responses, by family group

	Very happy		Pretty happy		Not too happy	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Intact family group	20	(48.8)	17	(41.5)	4	(9.8)
Divorced family group	6	(17.1)	22	(62.9)	7	(20.0)

Inventory, Parker (1983) found that a relationship between parent and child characterised by high care and low overprotection leads to healthy outcomes in adulthood.

The aim of the present analysis is to investigate the hypothesis that family processes will predict adolescent adjustment, irrespective of family structure.

Measures of Family Processes

We examined three types of family process — happiness, conflict and parent–child relationships.

Perceived family happiness This variable was measured by the following interview question: Taking all things together, how happy would you say your family is at present? Would you say it is (1) very happy (2) pretty happy (3) not too happy these days? Table 8 presents frequency distributions by family group.

Perceived family conflict The interview question measuring family conflict was: Most families have quarrels sometimes. Do the members of your family fight much? Would you say there is (1) a lot (2) a medium amount (3) not much fighting in your family? Table 9 presents frequency distribution by family group (scores were reversed for the analysis).

Table 9: Frequency distribution of current family conflict responses, by family group

	A lot of conflict		Medium conflict		Not much conflict	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Intact family group	6	(14.6)	12	(29.3)	23	(56.1)
Divorced family group	5	(14.3)	8	(22.9)	22	(62.9)

Parent–child relationships For this analysis we employed Parker's Bonding Inventory (1979), described in Chapter 3. This measure comprises two forms consisting of 25 statements rated by adolescents on a four-point scale from 'very like' to 'very unlike' the subject's mother or father. It yields dimensions of care and overprotection. The care scale taps the adolescent's perception of each parent in terms of warmth, understanding and acceptance through items such as: 'Speaks to me with a warm and friendly voice'; 'Makes me feel I'm not wanted'; 'Can make me feel better when I am upset'. The items making up the overprotection scale cover two broad areas of protective behaviour. A *controlling* dimension includes items such as: 'Tries to control everything I do'; 'Gives me as much freedom as I want'; 'Lets me decide things for myself'. A *dependency* dimension is expressed by items

such as: 'Does not want me to grow up'; 'Tries to make me dependent on him/her'; 'Feels I cannot look after myself unless he/she is around'; 'Invades my privacy'. This scale is designed to examine unduly controlling and dependence-inducing parenting practices as distinct from age-appropriate protectiveness. These dimensions were judged to be particularly relevant at adolescence where a caring parent who encourages independence may be seen as best-equipped to meet a youngster's developmental needs.

Outcome measures and covariates

All 13 outcome measures used earlier were employed for the happiness and conflict analyses. These were the 11 scales of the Offer Self-Image Questionnaire (OSIQ), the NSQ total, and the Langner total. For the parent–child analysis only the OSIQ total scores were used. Age and sex of the adolescent were included as covariates and sex of the custodial parent was also included in the parent–child analysis.

Is Adolescent Adjustment Related to Family Happiness and Conflict in Intact and Divorcing Families?

Using the same 13 outcome variables as in the previous analysis, MANOVAs were carried out to see whether the adolescent's perception of levels of family happiness and conflict would predict adjustment in both groups of families.

Family happiness For the intact group, level of family happiness was significantly related to adolescent adjustment ($F = 1.72$; d.f. = 26, 46; $p = .05$). For the divorcing group this relationship did not reach significance, although the contribution of their scores to the combined analysis improved the overall significance level for the total sample ($F = 1.81$; d.f = 26, 112; $p = .02$).

For intact families, holding age and sex constant, univariate analyses showed that family happiness was significantly related to three adjustment measures: OSIQ family relationships (.001); OSIQ impulse control ($p = .002$); and OSIQ body and self-image ($p = .007$). Among the adolescents from the divorcing families no univariate relationships were significant.

Family conflict Family conflict was examined in a similar way. For the intact group a highly significant relationship was found between conflict and adolescent adjustment ($F = 2.42$; d.f. = 26, 46; $p = .004$). For the divorcing group this relationship was weaker but approached significance at the .05 level and was well within the .15 level regarded as legitimate for main effects in a MANOVA analysis ($F = 1.81$; d.f. = 26, 32; $p = .056$).

The univariate analyses show that for the adolescents from intact families, holding age and sex constant, conflict is significantly related to: OSIQ

family relationships (p = .0001); OSIQ psychopathology (p = .002); OSIQ impulse control (p = .002); the Langner scale (p = .004) and OSIQ body and self-image scale (p = .01). Among the divorcing group conflict was significantly associated with the Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire (p = .007).

Interpretation of results

These results support the well-established link between high family conflict and poor child adjustment. This relationship is found in both groups of families, supporting the hypothesis that conflictual family processes are damaging. High conflict during marriage is strongly associated with poor adolescent adjustment, but high conflict after separation is also damaging. These results support and extend the findings of Nye (1957), Rutter (1971), Raschke and Raschke (1979) and others. (See Emery, 1982.)

The level of family happiness has been found to be significantly related to adolescent wellbeing in the intact but not the divorcing families. This finding emphasises the significance of the previous result and supports the interpretation we have placed upon it. An alternative explanation might have suggested that the poorly adjusted child may hold a uniformly negative view of the family, seeing it as both conflictual and unhappy. The discrimination found between unhappiness and conflict among the divorcing families suggests that this is not the explanation for our results. Adolescents, it seems, are capable of forming judgements about family processes

that are not merely a projection of their own psychological state. This result, therefore, pinpoints the salience of overt conflict as a predictor of adjustment in both intact and separated homes.

Family unhappiness may have different psychological consequences according to how it is perceived by a child. In divorcing families adolescents may be aware of parental unhappiness and may themselves be sad and regretful, but unhappiness during a radical family transition may be an appropriate and adaptive mourning response. For many of our subjects sadness was mingled with relief (see Chapter 11). A child in an intact family where there seems to be no end in sight to prolonged unhappiness is in a far more vulnerable position.

This finding suggests caution should be exercised in assuming that family processes affect children in identical ways irrespective of family structure. Divorce is such a major life event that it is likely to introduce new elements influencing the nature and outcome of family processes. A task of future research will be to specify in closer detail the nature and consequences of processes found to influence child adjustment in different family settings.

These analyses support the hypothesis that family processes predict adolescent adjustment, but point to differences in the ways in which processes may occur in families of differing structure.

Is Adolescent Adjustment Related to Parent–Child Relationships in Intact and Divorcing Families?

We next examine links between the adolescents' adjustment and their perception of the relationship with each parent in terms of care and overprotection, using scores on the Parent Bonding Inventory (PBI) as the predictor variable, and the total Offer Self Image Score (OSIQ) as the outcome variable.

Correlations between OSIQ scores and PBI sub-scales confirmed the relevance of this measure by revealing highly significant inter-relationships (Table 10). Correlations were higher for the intact family group than for the divorcing group, although the scores of the separated families contributed in the expected direction to the significance of the combined results. Since it appeared that these family processes were affecting children rather differently in each group, we carried out separate step-wise regressions for each family type.

Within non-divorcing families there was a highly significant relationship between poor adolescent adjustment and the presence of a father who was seen as overprotective ($F = 13.7$; d.f. = 1, 38; $p < .001$) and a mother seen as non-caring ($F = 9.9$; d.f. = 2, 37; $p < .001$). Together these variables account for 31.4 per cent of the total variance in OSIQ scores.

Within divorcing families the picture was different. Here, overprotectiveness on the part of the mother accounted for 19.4 per cent of the variance

($F = 8.5$; d.f. = 1, 30; $p < .01$), while addition of the father's overprotection scores raised the variance explained to 29.8 per cent ($F = 7.58$; d.f. = 2, 29; $p < .005$). Neither mothers' nor fathers' care added to the variance explained.

Sex and age of the child and sex of the custodial parent were also included as predictor variables, but these made no significant contribution to the variance in the Offer Self-Image scores.

Interpretation of results

These results suggest that while it is true that parent–child relationships are closely linked to adolescent adjustment in both kinds of families, linkages are different for intact and separated families.

In interpreting this result it must be noted that in both groups of families adolescents overall see their mothers as highly caring. Fathers are seen as

Table 10: Correlations between Parent Bonding Inventory sub-scales and Offer Self-Image Questionnaire total scores[1] for combined sample, intact and divorcing groups

PBI Sub-scales	Correlations (Pearson's r) with OSIQ Total		
	Combined Group	Intact Group	Divorcing Group
Mother's care	−.35**	−.47**	−.18
Mother's overprotection	.44***	.42**	.48**
Father's care	−.37***	−.44**	−.33*
Father's overprotection	.44***	.52***	.33*

1 Although these scales, not surprisingly, revealed significant inter-relationships, the correlation co-efficients do not reach a level where intercollinearity exists. The amount of variance unexplained fully justifies entering the scale scores as predictors in a multiple regression.

(* = $p<.05$; ** = $p<.01$; *** = $p<.001$.)

Table 11: Intact and divorcing families: step-wise regression: OSIQ total on PBI scales

	Adjusted R^2 (cumulative)	d.f.	F.	P.
Intact Group				
Father's overprotection	.25	1,38	13.71	.001
Mother's care	.31	2,37	9.93	.001
Divorcing Group				
Mother's overprotection	.19	1,30	8.48	.01
Father's overprotection	.30	2,29	7.58	.005

less caring among teenagers in divorcing families than those in intact families, but their average rating is not significantly different from that of Parker's norms (see Appendix 2). The differences we have found therefore occur within the context of generally very positive parent–child bonds.

In non-divorcing families the cumulative effect of a father seen as overprotective and a mother seen as non-caring is associated with poorer adolescent functioning. This combination is similar to the mother–child bonding category that Parker (1979) calls 'affectionless control' and which he found characterises the relationship of many depressives with their mothers. The converse of this bonding pattern is one which Parker calls 'optimal bonding' and which we find to be typified by the well-adjusted teenager in our sample whose mother is seen as affectionate and whose father is seen as encouraging independence. Our analysis differs from Parker's in that he looked at the contribution of each parent independently while we have examined the joint contributions of each parent.

Our findings draw attention to the patterns of inter-relationships which occur in families. Bowen (1978) and others have pointed out that families operate as systems, with each member influencing — and being influenced by — every other member. In the traditional family each parent contributes both affection and control, but the mother typically plays a more nurturing role while the father is the main authority figure. Our measures of care and overprotection seem to be picking up these traditional parenting roles among the non-divorcing families.

The results suggest adolescents benefit where these roles interact successfully, but adolescent adjustment is impaired where the mother is seen as lacking in care and the father as overcontrolling.

In divorcing families, the mother's overprotectiveness most strongly predicts the adolescent's adjustment, followed by that of the father. These results suggest that over and above a caring parent, adolescents in divorcing families need relationships encouraging reasonable independence and giving them space to become their own person.

As pointed out in Chapter 6, inspection of the items comprising Parker's overprotection scale shows that it measures two areas of protective parental behaviour, one which is controlling and one which perpetuates dependency. The shift from paternal to maternal overprotectiveness as the salient predictor of adjustment in separated families involves issues of both control and dependence. Controlling an adolescent is no easy task and as single parents many mothers have to take on the difficult job of exercising authority on their own. At the same time, parent–child relationships often become very close in the aftermath of a divorce. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) point out that prolonged, mutually dependent relationships may develop between single parents and their adolescent children which make it hard for the teenager to disengage from the family. Parents may unconsciously lean on their adolescents, failing to realise the need to 'let them go'.

Our results reflect the need for greater independence that some adolescents are experiencing. Conversely, they show that where parents in di-

vorcing families encourage autonomy, their adolescents' adjustment scores are highly favourable. This finding confirms Anthony's view (1974b) that this style of parenting provides children with personal strength in times of crisis.

It should be pointed out that Parker's scale refers to unhealthy levels of protection. Clearly adolescents need guidance and failure to set any limits may indicate parental neglect or rejection. Our interviews suggest adolescents respond to parents who understand their need for independence but also provide them with a secure, loving background, whatever the family structure.

Rutter's English study (1971) found that even in families experiencing major disruption, children's adjustment was significantly better if they had a warm relationship with at least one parent. He did not examine the additional effect of encouraging independence. We therefore carried out a further analysis to see whether adolescent self-image was affected by having parents who were at the same time highly caring and also low in overprotection.

Parents' PBI scores were dichotomised using Parker's means (1979), and parents with better than average scores on both scales were contrasted with those with poorer ratings. Having at least one parent with these scores (Parker's 'optimal bonding' category) was found to be significantly related to self-image. It made little difference whether father, mother or both parents were rated in this way, but where neither parent had this combination of qualities, adolescent scores were significantly less good. This was the case irrespective of the adolescent's age, sex or family group (see Appendix 3 for details).

Although 22 adolescents saw their relationship with neither parent as optimal, there were few who saw each parent as exceptionally low in both care and overprotection. Parker (1982) calls this bonding category 'neglectful parenting', and adolescents who see their parents in this light are likely to experience their freedom as rejection rather than independence. A possible explanation for the positive findings of the main analysis is that most adolescents in our study do have a good or reasonably satisfactory relationship with at least one parent. Perhaps this has sheltered them from the 'neurosis of abandonment' seen by clinicians in some children of divorce (Anthony, 1974).

It seems reasonable to believe that most divorcing parents do care about their children, and indeed those who have remained together for between 13 and 30 years are likely to have invested a great deal in their parenting role.

It should be pointed out that these results do not imply that parenting style is the sole — or even the main — determinant of adolescent adjustment. Parker (1981) provides evidence that his measure reflects actual parenting practices, but we cannot tell to what extent characteristics of the child interact with and evoke parents' responses. In addition, both Anthony (1974b) and Rutter (1971) point out that some children appear to be intrinsically more vulnerable to stress than others. Our results suggest ways in

which some of this stress may perhaps be mitigated through increased parental understanding of the developmental needs of adolescents.

Summary

This series of analyses confirms the expectation that family processes will predict adolescent adjustment, but show this does not hold true *irrespective* of family structure.

Family happiness, family conflict and parental care and overprotection are significant predictors of adolescent functioning in intact families. In divorcing families, high conflict predicts poor adolescent adjustment, but different patterns of parental care and overprotection have emerged. Clearly, such a major event as parental divorce alters the ways in which family processes occur and also introduces new elements which affect children's functioning: but our findings show that irrespective of whether parents are together or apart, adolescents who have a good relationship with at least one parent do markedly better than those who face life without this support.

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6

ADOLESCENT ADJUSTMENT: THE DIVORCING FAMILIES

In this chapter we look more closely at the differences in adjustment among adolescents from divorcing families only, in order to discover whether adjustment is affected by particular aspects of the divorce experience. First the effect on adjustment of the sex of the custodial parent is examined. We then turn to differences among adolescents in the ways in which the divorce is experienced and perceived.

Our broad hypothesis, it will be remembered, is that adolescent adjustment depends on family processes rather than family structure, and especially on the adolescent's perception of these events.

We use the term 'adjustment' to refer to global psychological adjustment in which, as we have seen, there are variations among teenagers from divorcing families. But all have to adjust to the divorce itself. In the present analysis we examine whether aspects of the adolescents' responses to the divorce are predictive of their global adjustment. Our specific hypothesis is that perception of improvement in the family situation will be the best predictor of adjustment.

Does the Sex of the Custodial Parent Affect Adjustment?

It has been suggested that difficulties in the adjustment of younger boys after divorce may be associated with the absence of their male parent. Warshak and Santrock (1983) and Santrock and Warshak (1979) cite evidence that 8 year-old boys and girls fare better with the parent of the same sex, although this issue is by no means settled (Clingempeel and Reppucci, 1982). Little is known about the effects of custody by the cross-sex parent at adolescence.

Under the Australian *Family Law Act* (1975), joint custody (where both parents share responsibility for decisions regarding the children) is the

assumed norm, although this may be altered by a judicial decision. One parent is normally granted 'care and control'. The child lives with this parent who is responsible for his or her daily care. For the purposes of this report, 'custodial parent' means the parent with whom the child usually lives.*

Twenty-seven per cent of the present sample were living with their fathers (three girls and seven boys). The remainder were either living with their mothers, or the mother was regarded as custodial parent — as, for example, where both parents were living separately under the same roof (a practice permitted under the *Family Law Act* during the mandatory 12 months' separation prior to divorce).

To find out whether boys and girls are better off in the custody of their mothers or their fathers, an ANOVA was carried out with the Offer Self-Image (OSIQ) total score as the outcome variable, the sex and age of the adolescents as covariates, and the sex of the custodial parent as the predictor variable.

There were no differences in adolescent adjustment according to the sex of the custodial parent, ($F = .79$; d.f. = 3, 30; $p = .434$), and no significant relationships between custody and sex or age of child.

It appears that at adolescence custody either by the cross-sex or the same-sex parent does not affect a child's adjustment. In the context of the analysis reported in the previous chapter it seems clear that quality of the relationship between a teenager and his or her custodial parent is more predictive of adjustment than sex of the parent or sex of the child. At adolescence the child's wishes usually contribute to the custody decision, increasing the likelihood that the arrangement will be satisfactory. Eighty-nine per cent of our subjects reported they were happy with custody and access arrangements.

What Aspects of the Divorce Experience Affect Adjustment?

Variables tapping the divorce experience

Adolescents were asked how they reacted to their parents' separation. These items were answered on three or four point scales allowing a range of replies from 'very strongly' to 'not at all'. An exploratory factor analysis described three factors (see Table 12), and items loading on these factors became the basis of three new variables entitled feelings, perception of conflict change, and positive acceptance.

Feelings This factor concerns the adolescent's emotional response to the

* In 1983, the Act was amended and the terminology (but not the substance) of these provisions was altered. Both parents are now assumed to have *guardianship* of their children, unless the Court orders otherwise, but *custody* (previously termed 'care and control') is normally vested in one parent.

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Table 12: Factor analysis of adolescents' feelings, perception of conflict change, and acceptance of their parents' divorce (Principal Factoring with Varimax Rotation)

Item	*F1*	*F2*	*F3*
*Sad	.84		
*Shocked	.80		
*Can't believe it	.75		
*Upset at first, now OK	.66		
Don't care	.56		
*Refuse to accept it	.66		
*Family less happy than before separation		.88	
Not much family fighting since separation		.77	
Things are better since separation		.74	
Family very happy at present		.68	
Less tension/fighting in the family		.57	
Less fighting since the separation than before		(.35)	
*Would you like your parents to get back together again?			.73
Relieved			.67
*Want parents to re-unite			.67
Glad			.63
Family happier now			.58
Eigen value	6.90	2.97	2.32
% Variance explained by each factor	33.6	14.4	11.3
% Variance explained (cumulative)	33.6	48.0	59.3

* Reverse-scored to provide consistent keying.

Note: Only the first three factors are included and only item-loadings with weights greater than .5.

divorce and provides a measure of the degree to which the child experienced the separation as strongly upsetting, sad, shocking and hard to believe or, conversely, as not sad (don't care, not upset).

Perception of conflict change This factor concerns the adolescent's perception of whether the current state of the family is more content and less conflictual than before the separation. It loads on items such as: 'Is there less tension and/or fighting in the family now than before?' 'Overall, are things better or worse than they were?' This factor differs from the earlier analysis of absolute levels of conflict and happiness in that the present focus is on the adolescent's perception of *change*.

Positive acceptance Factor three measures an acceptance dimension, loading on such items as, 'Would you like your parents to get back together again?' At one pole, it includes expressions of relief that the divorce has taken place, and at the other, the wish for parental reconciliation. This dimension includes a somewhat more cognitive aspect than the first factor.

Other predictor variables

Sex of adolescent Since we had found that boys differed from girls in their level of adjustment in the analysis of the sample as a whole (see Chapter 4), it was of interest to establish whether boys and girls were affected differently by their parents' separation. The sex of the adolescent was, therefore, initially included in the analysis of the divorcing families as a predictor variable. Among divorcing families none of the adolescent adjustment measures was significantly related to the child's sex. Sex was, therefore, dropped from this analysis.

Adjustment variables

The same 13 adjustment variables used in the earlier analyses were employed. These were the 11 Offer Self Image Questionnaire scales, the Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire and the Langner Psychiatric Screening scale.

Since school adjustment is likely to be affected by family turmoil we wished to discover whether adolescents' experience of the divorce was related to concern about their school performance. We therefore included an interview item tapping worries about school work among our outcome measures: Is school work a problem for you? Tell me if it is (a) a major worry, (b) quite a problem, (c) a little worrying, (d) no problem.

Results

To determine whether the adjustment scores of adolescents were associated with their *feelings* about the separation, their *perception of conflict change*, and their *positive acceptance* of their parents' separation, a one-way MANOVA was carried out using the 14 adjustment measures as dependent variables.

A significant relationship overall was found between all three predictors and adolescent adjustment ($F = 1.74$; d.f. = 42, 48; $p = .03$), indicating that there is a relationship between the way in which the adolescent experienced the separation, and his or her global adjustment. In order to determine the contribution made by individual predictors and specific areas of adjustment, univariate relationships were examined.

Perception of conflict change was found to be the strongest predictor. This variable affected scores on the NSQ ($t = 2.7$; $p = .012$) and school adjustment ($t = 2.6$; $p = .014$). It also influenced scores on the Langner scale ($t = 2.3$; $p = .028$) and the OSIQ Superior Adjustment scale ($t = 2.3$; $p = .028$). The univariate values for the outcome variables showed that other predictors not independently reaching significance also combined to influence the OSIQ Superior Adjustment scores ($p = .005$) and school adjustment ($p = .013$).

To see which of the divorce variables taken together contributed most to the univariate results, two initial step-wise regressions were carried out

with OSIQ superior adjustment and school adjustment as outcome measures, and feelings, conflict change and acceptance as predictors.

Conflict change accounted for the greatest amount of variance in both outcome variables. For superior adjustment, the addition of acceptance raised the variance explained to 31 per cent. School adjustment, conflict change and feelings together accounted for 26 per cent of the variance. The other predictor variables did not increase the total amount of variance explained. Tables 13 and 14 present the final results.

Interpretation of results

The present series of analyses examines how adolescents experienced their parents' separation, and seeks to identify any aspects linked to their adjustment.

The best predictor of adjustment is the adolescent's perception of the family's current functioning. The adolescent who judges the family to be better off since the separation is faring well. The child who views the family as less content than before and as rent by continuing conflict is significantly more likely to be less well-adjusted and to be having problems at school.

Conflict is associated with poor adjustment in both groups of families (Chapter 5). The present result takes this finding a step further, suggesting that adolescents have the capacity to recover from family turmoil provided divorce brings an improvement in the climate of the home.

This result opens up possible ways of minimising the damaging effects of family break-up. Counselling practices may alert parents to the damaging effects of embroiling children in continuing disputes. Since the child's perception of the family is so important, preparation by parents, including

Table 13: Divorcing families: step-wise regression: OSIQ Superior Adjustment on conflict change and acceptance

	Adjusted R^2 (cumulative)	d.f.	F.	P.
Conflict change	.25	1,31	11.94	.005
Acceptance	.31	2,30	8.24	.005

Table 14: Divorcing families: step-wise regression: school adjustment on conflict change and feelings

	Adjusted R^2 (cumulative)	d.f.	F.	P.
Conflict change	.23	1,31	10.48	.005
Feelings	.26	2,30	6.63	.01

explanation for the reasons for the decision to part, may help the adolescent to accept the separation as constructive rather than destructive, provided post-divorce conflict is reduced.

Taylor (1983) suggests that finding meaning in an event may be the first step in coping with it. At adolescence a child is cognitively mature enough to be able to understand the needs and motives of others. Understanding the divorce provides a basis for reconstruction. Like Marotz-Baden and colleagues (1979), we believe that attention should be paid to the 'active, adaptive' capacities of children in divorce. Adolescents are indeed capable of creative adaptation.

Conflict change, acceptance and superior adjustment

Offer, Ostrov and Howard (1981) regard the superior adjustment scale as one measuring ego strength and coping ability. The relationship we have found between this scale and the adolescent's acceptance of the divorce and his or her perception of the post-separation family as more contented and less conflictual is interesting. It may well be that those relationships are reciprocal rather than uni-directional. The child with superior coping ability may be better able to understand and accept family break-up; at the same time, cessation of conflict provides a climate which supports and enhances coping, while continuing family tension prevents adaptation.

Conflict change, feelings and school adjustment

The teenager who is unhappy about the separation and does not see the family as less conflictual or tension-ridden than before is significantly more likely to feel worried about school work than the child whose home life has become happier.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) note that school disruption is often associated with depression and anger in an adolescent's response to divorce, although some teenagers seem to throw themselves into their studies in an attempt to distance themselves from turmoil at home. Teenagers may sometimes give expression at school to feelings they cannot give vent to at home because they are aware of the unhappiness of the custodial parent. Such behaviour may be a cry for help.

In their Melbourne pilot stuy on one-parent families and education, Edgar and Headlam (1982) found that teachers viewed one-parent children as less emotionally stable than those from two-parent families. Perhaps teachers' observe the fall-off in performance and generally negative attitude to school of the adolescent experiencing protracted family disruption. The child who views his or her new situation as happier or who has adjusted sufficiently to have made up lost ground may be less visible. As Edgar and Headlam point out, it is important for teachers to be aware of the differences *within* the divorced population and the *individual* needs of children, so that a stereotyped 'child from a broken home' label is avoided, and the child in need of help can be identified.

EDIC
UTY
HILDREN

Sex

The sex of the adolescent was not related to adjustment scores. Since we found significant differences in adjustment between boys and girls in the combined sample, it is interesting that this difference disappears when the divorcing group is examined separately. The result may reflect the non-significant interaction effect noted earlier, where on some variables boys from divorcing families scored rather worse and girls scored as well as or a little better than those in intact families. Divorce seems to have narrowed the gap in adjustment scores between these boys and girls to the point where the advantage usually enjoyed by adolescent boys is no longer found.

An alternative interpretation

Before completing this discussion it should be noted that the same objections might be raised to the present interpretation as were discussed in the previous chapter. Perhaps the well-adjusted child perceives the family in a favourable light, while the disturbed adolescent sees only a change for the worse. While our data do not allow pre- and post-divorce analysis, the case histories presented in Part 2 show there are objective reasons why some children see their families as having changed for the better, while others see no improvement or believe that the situation has become worse.

Summary

Our main finding supports the view that the child's perception of the post-separation family situation is the best predictor of adjustment. The adolescent who judges the family to be more contented and less conflictual since the separation is significantly more likely to be psychologically well-adjusted than the child who believes that the family situation is worse, or who is still experiencing a high degree of family conflict.

The present analysis suggests that adolescents have generally attained a degree of psychological maturity which may help them understand and cope with separation. It is sometimes suggested that divorce hastens maturity.

7

DOES DIVORCE AFFECT ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT?

In the earlier chapters we examined the effect of divorce on adolescent adjustment. We now look at a rather different question. To what extent is a child's *developmental* progress affected when parents separate at adolescence?

A central task of adolescence is preparation for adult life. This involves greater participation in the world beyond the family, a gradual shedding of emotional dependence on parents, and increasing ability to be self-reliant and to take responsibility for one's own life. Erikson (1968) regards the key issue at this time as one of forming a sense of personal identity — a necessary basis for facing the challenges of adult life.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) comment on the impact of divorce on the developmental process. They regard the family as providing the context from which the adolescent tests out his or her skills in the world beyond. Acknowledging that divorce may hasten the normal process whereby adolescents learn to de-idealise their parents and see them as individuals, they fear that an insecure family may provide a poor haven at this critical time. A teenager may become over-burdened with responsibilities or propelled into precocious adulthood by awareness of a parent's sexuality. Conversely, emotional autonomy may be held back by an over-binding relationship with a grieving and dependent parent.

Longfellow (1979) points to the need to integrate the research findings of Wallerstein and Kelly with insights from social-cognitive theory. Adolescence is a time of remarkable cognitive growth. Children reach adult capacity for abstract thought during this stage; they can adopt a 'third person' viewpoint, seeing both their own and their parents' perspectives as they relate to one another.

Weiss (1979) provides yet another perspective. He points out that children's development may be markedly affected by a shift in power relationships in the family after divorce. Children in single-parent families often take on increased domestic responsibilities, share their parents' financial worries and take part in family decision-making processes.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) warn against the erosion of 'generational

boundaries' after divorce. Weiss (1979) found that inappropriate dependence by parents on children sometimes occurred at the height of family crisis, but that this was usually short-lived. A more egalitarian relationship with a parent did not necessarily involve role-reversal. Weiss concludes that adolescents, in contrast to younger children, are capable of managing greater responsibility and independence than they are usually given in non-divorcing families. Provided they have the support of a caring parent, this may lead to enhanced self-esteem as well as increased maturity.

Parents and adolescents in Weiss's study believed that divorce had caused children 'to grow up a little faster'. We found the same perception among our own divorced group subjects. However, as both adolescents and their parents recognise, it is hard to disentangle the effects of divorce from the normal processes of growing up — a question we examined by comparing the adolescents from the intact and divorcing families on a series of measures of maturity.

Measuring Adolescent Maturity

Questions designed to examine behavioural and attitudinal aspects of adolescent development were included in the adolescents' interview. Three maturity indices were derived from this material and from relevant items in the Offer Self-Image Questionnaire. The items comprising these indices were selected on theoretical grounds and combined to provide three scales examining different aspects of adolescent maturity — sexual behaviour, autonomous attitudes and independent behaviour (see Appendix 4).

Sexual behaviour Increasing involvement with the opposite sex is a major developmental issue at adolescence. The OSIQ scale examining sexuality is largely an attitudinal rather than a behavioural measure. The present index taps the adolescent's experience with the opposite sex and measures: degree of sexual intimacy experienced (5-point scale); dating (3-point scale); satisfaction (3-point scale) and dissatisfaction (3-point scale) with opposite-sex relationships; and pleasure experienced in sexual behaviour (6-point scale).

Autonomous attitudes The development of personal autonomy is a central aspect of adolescence. The following five items were selected from the Offer Self-Image Questionnaire to examine the level of autonomy expressed: The picture I have of myself in the future satisfies me; A job well done gives me pleasure; I know that if I will have to face a new situation I will try in advance to find out as much as possible about it; Whenever I fail in something, I try to find out what I can do in order to avoid another failure; I feel that I am able to make decisions. Each was scored on a 6-point scale.

Independent behaviour Decreasing dependence on the family circle is another aspect of adolescent development. From interview items a scale was developed which included behavioural indicators of the degree of adolescent

independence. These included: paid work experience (5-point scale); degree of participation in family outings and in activities within the home (5-point scale); evenings per week spent away from home (0–7); parents' knowledge of adolescents' whereabouts (4-point scale) and parents' acquaintance with adolescents' friends (4-point scale).

The projective device described in Chapter 3, 'Eggs in a Basket', was used to measure the extent to which the adolescents had differentiated him or herself from the family. It is a measure of the investment of self in the adolescent's own concerns and interests. Age and sex of adolescents were also included in all analyses.

Does Divorce Hasten Adolescent Maturity?

To test the hypothesis that, keeping age constant, adolescents from divorcing homes are more advanced than those from intact families in sexual behaviour, autonomous attitudes and independent behaviour, three MANOVAs were performed with group (intact or divorcing) and sex as factors, age as a covariate, and each of the three adolescent maturity indices as outcome measures.

Table 15 shows there were no significant differences between the groups or sexes on the three measures when age was held constant.

Examination of the links between age and individual items revealed a number of significant relationships and trends. Age was significantly related to sexual satisfaction ($p = .001$) and degree of intimacy experienced ($p = .003$). It was also associated, though less strongly, with three behavioural variables: paid job ($p = .013$); number of evenings out per week ($p = .015$); and friends not known to parents ($p = .028$). (Mean values on

Table 15: Adolescent maturity in intact and divorcing families: MANOVAs

	F	d.f.
Sexual behaviour		
Group	.760	5,64
Sex	1.524	5,64
Group × Sex interaction	.777	5,64
Autonomous attitudes		
Group	1.059	5,65
Sex	.916	5,65
Group × Sex interaction	.635	5,65
Independent behaviour		
Group	1.622	7,64
Sex	1.035	7,64
Group × Sex interaction	.945	7,64

the various items are given in Appendix 3).

The next step was to examine the degree to which the adolescent had differentiated him or herself from the family. An ANOVA was carried out, with scores on the Eggs in a Basket measure as the dependent variable, sex and age as covariates, and group as the predictor variable.

Once again, no differences were found between adolescents from intact and divorcing families (F .027; d.f. = 1, 72; p = .870), but self scores were significantly related to age (F = 7.787; d.f. = 1, 72; p = .007). Sex was not a significant variable.

These results do not support the hypothesis that adolescents from divorcing families are more mature than those from intact families. Instead it was found that similar developmental levels are present in both groups of families, and that age is a better predictor of maturity than family structure.

Interpretation of results

Results of the analysis of adolescent maturity reinforce the picture presented by the adjustment analysis: teenagers from both groups of families are basically very similar. Maturity, however, is a difficult concept to measure. The age-related relationships and trends that were found give credence to the validity of our indices, but the measures may not have been sensitive enough to pick up the more subtle effects of parental separation on attitudes and behaviour.

We asked teenagers from the divorcing families whether they thought that the separation had caused them to grow up more quickly. Seventy-one per cent believed it had had this effect. A typical response from a 15 year-old was:

'Yes. Mentally I feel I'm more mature and more advanced than a lot of my friends because you have to understand life more. I now know that life and marriage isn't "happy ever after" — it may or may not work.'

Others remarked that they felt they were more mature than they had been, but could not say whether it was the divorce that had caused this. A 15 year-old commented:

'It's a bit of a step in growing up, getting a job. And it was time to leave school anyway at the same time as the separation. So it's all been together.'

Sexual behaviour

It is interesting to find that age is a better predictor of advanced sexual behaviour than is family group or sex of the adolescent. A common stereotype attaching to children of divorce is that because parents are separated, adolescents are exposed to greater evidence of adult sexuality and are, therefore, more likely to become sexually active themselves.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) report that adolescents in their sample were highly disturbed by their parents' sexual activity, and that girls sometimes found themselves in sexual competition with a custodial parent newly on

the marriage market. They do not state their ages nor how many of their sample of 11 girls (aged 13 to 18) were affected.

While these processes may affect some adolescents, the finding that age rather than family structure is related to sexual behaviour draws attention to the need for careful control group comparisons.

Among adolescents in our sample there was evidence of some sexual anxiety, especially among those who have experienced violent or promiscuous adult behaviour; however, we did not find the rivalrous atmosphere described by Wallerstein and Kelly. Their concern about the need to maintain generational boundaries seems theory-based and obscures recognition of the increasing cognitive maturity of adolescents. Where parents and children shared a caring and open relationship we found adolescents able to understand parents' sexual needs and to handle their own developing sexuality without undue stress.

Autonomous attitudes

This index was found to be unrelated to group, sex or age. Lack of any relationship to age may indicate that these items reflect enduring personality

traits rather than age-related characteristics. Alternatively, variablity in the age of the acquisition of autonomous attitudes may mean that our age span (13–16) was too narrow to pick up any trends.

Independent behaviour

This index, like the first, is related more closely to age than to group. Weiss (1979) and other commentators speak of the increased responsibilities taken on by children of divorce. In the present sample, no differences were found in the frequency of household tasks undertaken by teenagers in each family group. It may be that younger children of divorce take on more responsibilities at an earlier age. By adolescence, children in both types of family are expected to accept domestic responsibilities, especially when both parents are working. One boy from a non-divorcing family was paid by his parents to do all the housework and to rake the lawns and water the garden. He proudly showed the interviewer over the house to demonstrate his skill. A girl from the same group minded her younger siblings after school as well as working on a milk-run each morning.

For both groups of families, adolescence is the time when independence exerts its pull. Children begin to turn increasingly to activities beyond the home, to earn money for themselves, and to spend more time with friends of both sexes.

Eggs in a basket

This projective measure was included in order to operationalise the process of individuation or transference of investment of the self from the family to one's own concerns and interests. The highly significant relationship between age and the number of 'eggs' retained for the self supports the validity of the measure as an indicator of maturity. Once again, the findings reveal no differences between the groups or sexes: adolescents in both types of family are involved in the process of individuation in an age-related way.

Summary

Clearly it is difficult to distinguish the effects of a major life event such as divorce from the normal developmental changes that occur at adolescence. Many of the teenagers from divorcing families believe that the divorce has caused them to grow up more quickly, and we shall examine their reponses in Chapter 10. The maturity analysis reported in this chapter shows that adolescents in both family groups are proceeding along similar developmental paths.

Rather than asking whether divorce hastens maturity, more pertinent questions may be: What developmental strengths do adolescents possess? How can adults best draw upon these strengths to help teenagers cope with family crisis?

8

PARENTAL APPRAISAL OF ADOLESCENT ADJUSTMENT

Apart from demographic information supplied by parents, the data examined so far have been derived from adolescent measures and interviews. This has flowed logically from our stated intention of adopting the adolescents' perspective in this study. The picture presented is of the adolescents' self-image in the context of their view of family relationships. The argument for this approach is a phenomonological one. If we wish to understand a child's experience it is necessary to see it as clearly as possible as he or she perceives it. Thus the adolescent's self-concept, his or her view of the relationship with each parent, and judgement of the level of family happiness or conflict are data providing an integrated child's-eye-view.

In the present chapter we step out of this framework to examine the parents' view of their adolescent children, with the aim of discovering whether the results obtained with adolescents' self-report questionnaires are corroborated by using an independently derived measure.

Development of Parents' Appraisal Scale

Questions were included in the parents' interview schedule designed to ascertain how parents' viewed their children in terms of adjustment and maturity (Table 16). These were answered on a four-point scale and half were initially reverse-scored to avoid a response set. In the intact families parents jointly answered these questions, but divorcing parents were interviewed separately and the responses of the custodial parent are included in this analysis.

A total Appraisal Scale was developed from these items with a satisfactory reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .82). Six sub-scales were derived by factor analysis, the same solution resulting from the use of VARIMAX and OBLIMEN procedures. The sub-scales were named (F1) self-reliance, (F2)

responsibility, (F3) empathy, (F4) impulsivity, (F5) cooperation and (F6) independent decision-making. The sub-scales throw useful light on aspects of the Appraisal Scale, but are not regarded as robust enough to be used independently.

Table 16: Factor Analysis of Parents' Appraisal Scale (Principal Factoring with Varimax Rotation)

Item	*F1*	*F2*	*F3*	*F4*	*F5*	*F6*
Can't concentrate for long	.78					
Lacks enterprise and initiative	.74					
Is easily led by others	.61					
*Has a go at doing difficult things alone		.63				
Makes a fuss when extra jobs need to be done		.54				
*Can be relied on to do what she/he says she/he will do		.76				
*Sees what needs to be done and does it without being told		.78				
*Is understanding of parents' worries and problems			.84			
*Cares about other peoples' feelings			.87			
*Accepts life in a realistic way				.64		
Cannot be trusted to behave responsibly				.76		
Acts before thinking, is impulsive				.55		
Is sulky if unable to have own way					.76	
Prefers to spend time with friends rather than family					.76	
Wants parents to make up his/her mind for him/her						.78
Finds it very hard to make decisions						.66
Eigen value	4.27	2.15	1.55	1.27	1.05	1.02
% Variance explained by each factor	26.7	13.4	9.7	8.0	6.6	6.4
% Variance explained (cumulative)	26.7	40.1	49.7	57.7	64.3	70.6

* Item reversed to provide consistent keying.

Note: Only item-loadings with weights greater than .5 are included.

Relationships Between Adolescents' Self-report Scores and their Parents' Appraisal

Here, we examine the relationship between the Parents' Appraisal Scale and the standard measures employed in the analyses reported in previous chapters.

Adolescent outcome measures and parents' appraisal

The Parents' Appraisal Scale was not designed to measure precisely the same range of adjustment variables as the Offer Self-Image Questionnaire. However, as both measures tap a common domain it is reasonable to predict that the adolescent who is seen as well-adjusted and mature by others will also have a positive self-image.

A correlation analysis confirmed this prediction. The total Appraisal Scale was found to be significantly correlated with the OSIQ total scores ($r = .36$, $p = .001$).

Analysis of the sub-scales of both measures likewise showed patterns of relationships that were either significant or showed trends in the expected direction (Table 17). These were especially evident with the OSIQ sub-scales: family, superior adjustment, impulse control and mastery of the external world. Interestingly, the only pattern of negative correlations occurred between the OSIQ sexual attitudes scale and five of the Appraisal sub-scales. This was largely a non-significant trend, but the consistency of the pattern points towards parental unease in handling adolescents who are advanced in their psychosexual development.

No relationships were found between the Appraisal Scale and the OSIQ Psychopathology Scale, nor the Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire, but adolescents reporting more symptoms on the Langner Psychiatric Screening Scale were rated by their parents as impulsive ($r = .27$, $p = .009$).

Parent Bonding Inventory and Parents' Appraisal

It was predicted that a relationship would exist between parents' opinions of their children and adolescents' rating of parents. The total Appraisal Scale scores were therefore correlated with the rating scores given by the adolescents to their parents on the Parent Bonding Inventory (Table 18).

A significant relationship was found between positive adolescent appraisal by parents and adolescents' ratings of their mothers as caring ($r = -.28$; $p = .008$), while negative appraisal by parents was significantly correlated with adolescents' ratings of fathers as overprotective ($r = .27$; $p = .009$).

Appraisal sub-scales related to these two variables show two distinct patterns. The adolescent regarding his or her mother as caring is viewed by parents as empathic, responsible and capable of independent decision mak-

Table 17: Correlations (Pearson's r) between Parents' Appraisal Scales, Offer Self-Image Scales and Total and Langner Psychiatric Screening Scale

	Parents' Appraisal Scales					
	Empathic	Self-reliant	Non-impulsive	Responsible	Co-operative	Decisive
OSIQ Scales						
Impulse control	.13	.19*	.27**	.16	.17	.30***
Social	.20*	.21*	.23*	.10	.10	.13
Sexual attitudes	−.04	.10	−.18	−.24*	−.24*	−.07
Family	.21*	.12	.40****	.27**	.44****	.10
Mastery	.21*	.34***	.15	.18	.09	.13
Vocation/education	.17	.29**	.12	.23*	.13	.17
Superior adjustment	.20*	.46****	.20*	.16	.19*	.23*
Offer Total	.23*	.27**	.28**	.17	.25*	.20*
Langner Scale	.03	.18	.27**	−.01	.13	.18

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.005; ****p<.001 *Note* Scores on all scales are keyed so that the lower the score the better the adjustment.

Table 18: Correlations (Pearson's r) between Parents' Appraisal Scales and Parent Bonding Inventory Scales

PBI Scales	Parents' Appraisal Scales					
	Empathic	Self-reliant	Non-impulsive	Responsible	Co-operative	Decisive
Mother caring	−.24*	−.05	−.18	−.23*	−.17	−.24*
Mother overprotective	.04	.07	.15	.02	.10	−.06
Father caring	−.00	.02	−.12	−.06	−.17	.04
Father overprotective	.03	.32***	.34***	.07	.22*	.01

(*p<.05; ***p<.005) *Note* Parental Appraisal Scales and PBI Overprotection Scales are keyed so that the lower the score the better the adjustment but the reverse applies to PBI Care scores.

ing. Conversely, the child who sees the father as overprotective is in return regarded as impulsive, uncooperative and lacking in self-reliance.

Interpretation of results

The foregoing analyses support the prediction that relationships exist between the Parents' Appraisal Scale and the adolescents' self-report measures. Furthermore, the patterns that have emerged make good sense.

The significant correlation between parents' appraisal of their children and adolescents' OSIQ scores indicates two things: first, that parents understand their children fairly well; and second, that adolescents are capable — as claimed by Offer, Ostrov and Howard (1981, p.31) — of providing valid self-descriptions.

The patterns that emerge from the Parent Bonding correlations, though moderate, are intriguing. They seem to reflect the traditional sex-roles noted in Chapter 5, where mothers play the major nurturant role and fathers exercise authority in a considerable number of families. These results also lend support to the view that family processes are reciprocal, as suggested in Chapter 5. When relationships are cordial, the adolescent is viewed in a positive light, and the parent is described as warm and nurturant: conversely, the adolescent who is regarded as impulsive and uncooperative views the parent as over-intrusive and too controlling. Correlations, of course, cannot imply causality. These results suggest that benign or maladaptive modes of interaction exist in some families involving reciprocal parent–child mutuality or hostility.

Are There Differences Between Adolescents from Intact and Divorcing Families as Measured by the Parents' Appraisal Scale?

The analysis reported in Chapter 4 found no significant differences in adjustment between adolescents from intact and divorcing families, using a battery of self-report measures. In order to test these results using an independent measure, a MANOVA was performed with the total Parental Appraisal Scale as the outcome variable, group (intact or divorcing) and sex of adolescent as the predictor variables, and age as covariate.

Table 19 indicates no significant differences in adjustment and maturity between teenagers from intact and divorcing families, as judged by their parents. These results provide support for our previous main finding that no differences in psychological adjustment were found between adolescents from the two family groups on 13 self-report measures.

It is interesting to note that the sex difference observed earlier does not emerge from the present analysis. Parents see their daughters and sons as

Table 19: Multivariate significance table — Parental appraisal of adolescents in intact and divorcing families

	F	d.f.	P
Group	.16	1,73	.69
Sex	.01	1,73	.92
Group × Sex	.40	1,73	.53

equally well-adjusted and mature, whereas girls scored rather worse than boys on the self-report measures of adjustment. The scales contributing most to the earlier findings were the Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire, the Langner Psychiatric Screening Scale, and the OSIQ sexual attitudes scale. We have seen that parents' attitudes to adolescent sexuality are somewhat ambivalent and that the NSQ appears to tap a domain which is rather different from that of the Parents' Appraisal Scale. These differences may account for the disparity between the results; alternatively, parents may not be aware of the subtle differences existing between male and female adjustment at adolescence.

A further question of interest is whether parental appraisal differs according to whether the adolescent (male or female) is living with the mother or the father. Again, a MANOVA found no significant differences according to sex and custody ($F = .46$; d.f. = 2,71; $p = .64$). This result supports the finding reported in Chapter 6.

Summary

Use of an independently derived measure has supported the main results of analyses using adolescents' self-reported scores. Again, no differences in adjustment were found between adolescents from intact and divorcing families.

As previously pointed out, the Parents' Appraisal Scale does not examine exactly the same areas of psychological functioning as the Offer Self-Image Questionnaire. However, as has been shown, both measures tap a common domain, and total scores are significantly correlated. The present scale may be seen as most closely related to the areas of the self tapped by the family, superior adjustment, impulse control and mastery scales of the OSIQ. This domain provides a useful guide to relevant aspects of adolescent psychological health and wellbeing.

The Parents' Appraisal Scale also measures aspects of maturity, especially in the areas of responsibility, self-reliance and independent decision making. Therefore, the present findings also lend support to the maturity analysis reported in Chapter 7, where, once again, no differences between the two groups of adolescents were found.

As with the earlier analysis, the present results indicate that while the mean scores for adolescents from both groups are similar, there is a range of adjustment and maturity within each family group. Not all children are doing equally well. Processes within the family have again been shown to be closely associated with these outcomes.

Part Two

THE DIVORCING FAMILIES:

Qualitative Findings

9

CASE HISTORIES: ADOLESCENTS WHO FARED WELL OR POORLY

This study adopts an integrative approach, combining systematic statistical analyses with qualitative information from in-depth interviews. The desirability of such a method struck us forcibly when examining the available literature on children in divorce. On the one hand, quantitative surveys and laboratory studies yielded well-validated group results; on the other, case history data presented by clinicians provided rich information about individual families in the context of their daily lives.

Each approach had its strengths and weaknesses. Quantitative studies using standard measures may be replicated; traditional research methodology provides rigour and permits scrutiny and comparison of research results; studies which provide control groups guard against inappropriate generalisation of results. Qualitative methods provide insights into the variability of individual lives, opportunities to discover the unanticipated, and ways to explore the personal meanings that illuminate results.

A combination of both methods allows us to place case histories within a context of standard measures and control-group comparisons, and to illuminate group findings with understanding of the patterns of individual lives.

In the first part of this report we presented our quantitative analysis. We now turn to responses given by adolescents for a closer look at the meanings that lie behind the statistical results, and the more subtle relationships that do not emerge from the numerical analysis of groups — material which provides clues by which to interpret the direction of the earlier results.

This chapter looks at four families where children have exceptionally high and exceptionally low adjustment scores. In Chapter 10 certain families which have experienced special kinds of stress are examined, and in Chapter 12 we refer to families who typify certain patterns of response.

Since the main focus is on the impact of divorce, case histories are confined to the divorcing families. *All names and personal details have been changed to protect confidentiality.*

Exceptionally Well Adjusted Adolescents

It so happens that the child with the poorest overall adjustment scores is a girl from an intact family, while the best adjusted is also a girl, 'Sarah', from the divorcing group.

Sarah

Sarah is a slim, red-headed, 15 year-old. Poised and independent, she lives with her mother in an inner city suburb. Curled up in a bean-bag chair with the family cat on her lap, she told us that she likes school, but is selective about her friends and does not think much of what she calls 'the sex, drugs and rock and roll' sub-culture. It annoys her when people speak as if teenagers were one homogeneous group.

Sarah has experienced family break-up twice. The first marriage ended when she was about eight with bitter, and at times violent, rows over custody. The second marriage ended after a troubled relationship developed between her stepfather and her brother. A highly charged emotional atmosphere came to a head in a violent scene at which Sarah was present. She describes herself as having been 'relieved of a big burden' when the marriage ended.

Sarah's scores on all the adjustment measures are remarkably good. She has the best Offer score of the entire sample, no Langner symptoms, and normal NSQ scores. From her interview she comes across as a caring, thoughtful and mature adolescent.

What have been the strengths that have helped Sarah come through these experiences so well? Her relationship with her mother falls into Parker's 'optimal bonding' category (Parker, 1979). She sees her mother as exceptionally caring and, at the same time, not overprotective. It appears that this relationship has provided a source of support and strength without becoming over-intrusive or binding. Sarah writes of her mother:

'She is an intelligent and reasonable person. She is helpful, understanding, considerate and treats me as more of an equal than a daughter . . . our relationship is close and has unusual depth and sincerity.'

She values this relationship highly, yet the 'eggs in a basket' (see Chapter 3) scores show that her personal autonomy is not threatened by it. She retains a healthy number of 'eggs' for her own interests and friends.

Sarah feels strongly that parents should not involve their children in their own differences, but that older children should be kept informed about what is happening to the family and its consequences for them. When we asked what advice she would give to separating parents on how best to help their children, she replied:

'Never try to degrade one parent to a child against the other — it really twists the child up. If a kid is over ten they should know what's going on and the consequences — the possibilities of custody and all that.'

Sarah's advice to other children of divorce reveals something of her own coping strategies and gave us the title of this report:

'Don't believe what the other parent says unless you know it for a fact. Don't worry too much. Be optimistic. Talk to someone in the same boat — don't feel the world is caving in.'

Sarah is a girl of considerable strength and she has been supported by a stable and caring parent, but her experiences have left a mark. She has a strong dislike of violence and there is some evidence of anxiety which expresses itself in dreams. She is wary of sexual relationships unless 'they are close and involve personalities'. She does not want to fall into the trap of being 'used' by someone who might seem to be nice but then turn out to be only after sex.

She jokes about marriage: 'I tell Mum I'll never get married, but I think she's changing that!' But there is an underlying note of anxiety. She is concerned about findings that children whose parents have divorced often end up divorced themselves. She is cautious about marriage, and isn't too keen about the idea of having children — although she doesn't rule out the possibility.

Sarah feels that her childhood has been shortened. She has had to take more responsibilities and to adopt more mature attitudes than other children. She has learned to cope with financial hardship. She has also learned to be discerning in her judgements about people, and there is a touch of cynicism when she warns that 'it's easy for a child to play off a parent for what they've got'.

Divorce, then, has affected Sarah's attitudes and left her somewhat wary, but she also sees herself as equipped to cope realistically with the future. She sees her mother as a warm and dependable friend. This relationship and her own considerable strength seem to have brought her through the experience with a clear sense of who she is and where she is going.

Despite concern that her mother may be lonely, Sarah sees the present situation of the family as far better than before. She is happier at her new school and feels relief after the tensions of the marriage. Despite its geographical separation, she sees her family as a changed but continuing unit.

Tom

Tom comes from a family type that is becoming increasingly common — both his parents had children of former unions before they married. Tom and the two brothers born of the marriage grew up in a large 'blended' family until his parents decided to part. Now he lives in the family home with his father, a younger brother, and his father's new young partner. The house, in a beach suburb, had surf-boards and flippers stacked in the carport, and a beach-buggy parked in the drive.

Like Sarah, Tom has exceptionally good adjustment scores. His OSIQ total is among the best in the combined sample, his Langner score is zero, and his NSQ results are within the normal limits, though the depression

scale is somewhat elevated. Tom sees both his parents as exceptionally caring and low in overprotection (Parker's 'optimal bonding' category).

Tom is an engaging, sociable boy, suntanned, with blue eyes and a shock of blond hair. He regrets the geographical separation of the family but, like Sarah, he still sees it as a viable unit:

'I like the family thing — it would be nice being a big family. But there are no big hassles about it for me. They're still alive and I can still see them — so it doesn't bother me. It takes time to go down and see Mum — but I go when I have time.'

He arranged the 'family sculpture' (see Chapter 3) with his parents looking away from each other but with the children gathered closely around them.

Though Tom probably feels the separation more than he lets on, as an adolescent he is able to understand his parents' needs. The new situation does not conflict with his own developmental need to separate from the family and move out into the world.

Common themes

There are common themes in the cases of Sarah and Tom. Both score well on the adjustment measures, but there are also some signs of stress. Each lives with a parent who is seen as caring and not overprotective, and in each case the parents have taken care not to let the child become embroiled in their disagreements. Neither gives the impression of feeling rejected.

Sarah and Tom both have a sense of the family as a continuing entity. Separation has changed but not destroyed it. The notion of a 'broken' family seems inappropriate from the point of view of these youngsters. While Sarah sees the current family situation as improved, Tom misses the big family he grew up in, but both believe that the separation is final, and that it was the best thing from the parents' point of view. Each has interests and friends beyond the family circle, and the separation has not held back the normal developmental movement towards the world beyond.

Neither teenager reports having any serious problems; they see themselves as coping well with their lives and describe their families as 'very happy'. Both seem to have adopted a strategy of distancing themselves from their parents' turmoil. Tom says to other adolescents, 'Don't let it bother you too much' and Sarah says, 'Be optimistic'.

Adolescents with Poorer Adjustment Scores

Mark and Felicity have not come through the experience of their parents' divorces so well.

Mark

Mark's family is one of a small group having some features in common — in each, middle-aged parents separated after up to thirty years of marriage, in each case there was a strong religious background, and most were large families. The divorce came as a shock to the children and produced conflicts between religious convictions and attachments to each parent.

Adolescents tend to be idealistic and are often strongly committed to their religious faith. In these cases the separation caused intellectual as well as emotional upheaval. In this group of families the divorce tended to cause shock waves that affected older children who had already left home as well as the teenagers who were still at school. School performance was often affected, although this tended to be a temporary reaction.

Most of these children had idealised their parents; the separation revealed them as ordinary human beings with their own needs and problems. For a number, the experience of divorce had been very painful, especially as commonly one or other of the parents was devastated by the sudden ending of a lengthy, though less than perfect, marriage. In most of these cases,

however, a new family structure was beginning to emerge, and the adolescents were adjusting to it in different ways.

Fifteen year-old Mark, tall, with glasses, lives with his mother and older sister in the family home on the northern outskirts of Sydney. He is caught in a situation where his mother clings to the hope of a reconciliation. A lot of turmoil remains in the family and little progress has been made towards establishing a new family structure. Mark's adjustment scores show signs of stress.

He and his sisters knew nothing of the events leading up to the separation:

'I was kept in the dark, which I didn't like. Then Dad said, 'I'm just moving out for a while to have a rest'. A week after that I realised it was going to take a year to settle — or a couple of years — or never.'

Mark's mother is anxious and depressed. The PBI shows that Mark sees her as more overprotective than is usual. She strongly disapproves of divorce on religious grounds, and bitterly resents that her marriage can be ended without her consent. Mark shares her convictions, and half believes that his parents may become reconciled, although in fact his father has no intention of returning.

He misses his father and wishes he could see him more often: 'I see him once a week, but I don't call that "regularly"'. In the 'family sculpture' he places himself beside his father. The pattern shows a tight bunching of family members, as though acceptance of the separation is being denied. Mark sees the present family situation as pretty bad. His mother and sister have constant fights:

'Carol says, "No wonder Dad left you", and Mum doesn't like that! They go on and on at each other. Mum starts up again. Yabber, yabber, yabber.'

Mark has few friends he can turn to among the boys at the church school he attends:

'I've kept it mainly to myself. Some kids in the form are so rotten they'd rip you to pieces on it. You survive and go on with life. You're the same person, a little bit wiser. There's not much anyone can do for you.'

He talks with wry humour about his feeling of disillusionment about his parents: 'I always looked up to my mother and father as infallible. Now you find they're normal human beings'.

Mark is an unhappy and conflicted boy. His school performance has fallen well below his capacity. A former excellence in science expresses itself in his passionate addiction to science fiction, films and books — the bookshelf in the sun-room where we talked was lined with paperbacks with titles that spoke of inter-galactic wars. While this is not an unusual pastime for an adolescent, there was an obsessive quality about the way Mark spoke about this fantasy world which seemed to be providing a substitute for reality for him.

The boy is in a situation where there is little room for adjustment to the

divorce. The atmosphere of moral indignation makes it hard to come to terms with the reality of the failed marriage; the lingering hope of reconciliation prevents adjustment to a new family structure.

The 'eggs in a basket' score shows that Mark keeps a reasonable share of 'eggs' for himself, indicating that the process of separation from the family is taking place, as is appropriate in adolescence. However, rather than investing his interests and concerns in a social world beyond the family, Mark seems to be retreating into a fictional world where battles in space echo the dissensions and moral dilemmas of his family.

Felicity

Felicity, aged 14, is another child caught, at least temporarily, in a no-win situation. Her parents have been 'separated under the same roof' for the previous year in an atmosphere of mounting hostility. In an economic situation with high mortgage repayments and rents, it is not uncommon for a couple to remain in the same house, but not cohabiting. How this arrangement works out in practice depends very much on factors within the family. The weight of evidence shows that living in an atmosphere of high conflict is damaging to children, whether the parents are divorced or not. Remaining together after separation but prior to divorce may create a situation which traps a child in loyalty conflicts, parental turmoil, and uncertainty about the future. The process of readjustment, which is already taking place in most of our separated families is inevitably delayed.

Felicity's father refuses to move out of the house because he is strongly opposed to the divorce. His wife sees her place as with the children. Economic reasons and the unresolved question of who is to have custody keep them together but apart.

Felicity's adjustment measures indicate a high degree of stress. One parent shows high levels of anxiety, but both are seen by their daughter as normally caring and not overprotective. When constructing the 'family sculpture', Felicity uses the entire chess-board to indicate emotional distances between the members of her family; it is as though the family unit has exploded into separate bits. She says of her sister:

'Jane and I are far apart because we don't get on. We fight. I probably equally like Mum and Dad, even though I get a bit mad with both of them sometimes.'

At first Felicity thought the separation would mean that the fighting would stop:

'. . .but they're still fighting because they're still under one roof . . . about petty things, like the soap powder. It would be better for all of us if they weren't under the same roof, you'd see the better side of them.'

Felicity describes the atmosphere of conflict that seems to pervade the family:

'Jane and I have become more apart, more angry with each other. I think we've taken over the same role without realising it. Mum tries to get us to see her side of the

story, and Dad tries to get us to see his. It's not an objective point of view any more. I just try to figure it out for myself.'

The separation has clearly brought a sense of disillusionment that most 14 year-olds would not have experienced, but it also seems to have brought increased understanding:

'It's helped me see Mum separately in a new light and Dad separately in a better light. Mum's pretty much the same, only more independent. It's helped bring me closer to Dad, though it would be better if I saw him more. Dad's worried and kind of scared of losing Jane and me. I think he's afraid of being unwelcome as a father.'

She feels that the separation has made her grow up more quickly because it has made her think about the future more:

'I worry about that, in a way. I don't want my marriage to break down. I don't think about it much, but I do think about it.'

Her advice to parents about to separate is unambiguous:

'Don't *live under one roof. And try and see as much of the children equally as you can.'*

To the children she says:

'Try to understand what's going on, because it will probably benefit you eventually.'

Like Mark, Felicity is living in a situation from which there are no immediate escape routes. She had, in fact, run away from home for a short time. However, despite these signs of psychological stress, the outlook for Felicity seems rather more hopeful than for Mark. Her family is still in a state of crisis, but decisions about splitting the property and about with whom the children will live must be made soon. Studies suggest that it normally takes 18 months to two years for the adaptation from one family structure to another to take place (Goldsmith and Smiley, 1981). Separation under the same roof has held up this process, but once it is in train the situation should improve.

Felicity is a perceptive girl who cares about both her parents and understands that each of them has needs the other cannot meet. She sees them both as caring and non-intrusive in their relationships with herself. There is something on which to build a new family structure, once physical separation has been achieved.

Common themes

Mark and Felicity are both trapped in family situations of drawn out conflict. Both see their families as less happy than before, and both are sad about the separation. For each, an atmosphere of continuing crisis prevents adaptation from taking place.

Each are in the predicament of loving both parents and wanting to maintain an even-handed relationship. In Felicity's case this is particularly hard as

each parent vies for her support and denigrates the other. For Mark the problem is rather different. He is struggling to build a relationship with his father, a silent, emotionally inaccessible man, who according to his own 'family sculpture' no longer sees himself as part of the family circle at all. His mother wants her husband back, and stresses how much her children need their father.

The families are also similar in that parental conflict has spilled over into wider family turmoil. Felicity's comment that she and her sister seem to have unconsciously taken over the antagonistic roles of their parents is especially perceptive. Divorce research often concentrates exclusively on marital conflict but in our sample it is *family* conflict, rather than disputes between the parents only, that is significantly related to adolescent adjustment.

This point is worth emphasising as it shows the importance of the family as a system. Children themselves play a part in family disturbance, and may contribute to conflict between adults especially in adolescence. Disputes about behaviour, attitudes, and independence come to a peak at this age. Sibling rivalry is also likely to emerge where parents may be competing for the support of their children.

Another common theme is one which emerges in many of the interviews. Mark expresses his anger at having been 'kept in the dark'; his advice to parents about to separate is 'tell your children everything before it happens'. Felicity's parents each explained that the divorce was going to take place: 'They said, "We're going to be separated. You'll be all right. We still love you"'. Felicity advises children to 'try to understand what's going on'.

Adolescents repeatedly expressed their appreciation of parents who took them into their confidence and explained what was going on. Not all parents feel capable of doing this successfully, especially where they are themselves overwhelmed by the divorce. Where it can be achieved, the mutual trust that this sort of open communication involves provides the teenager with the opening to express his or her own feelings. It provides reassurance that the child's relationship with the parent will not be shaken by the divorce. Many teenagers reported that in some ways the divorce had brought closer understanding between themselves and their parents.

10

CASE HISTORIES: FAMILIES WITH HIGH PRE-DIVORCE STRESS

Our sample contained couples who had separated for a variety of reasons. In many cases parents had drifted apart over time. The adolescent stage of a child's life often coincides with what has come to be known as a 'mid-life crisis' for parents. Often a review of the marriage was provoked by unsatisfactory sexual relations, the discovery of long-term infidelity on the part of a spouse, or dissatisfaction with a relationship providing no room for personal growth. Sometimes there had been serious trouble for many years.

Adolescents with Difficult Family Experiences

In a small group of families one partner had taken out an injunction restraining the other from acts of violence or sexual interference with children; in others, similar problems had occurred but resort had not been made to the Court. One teenager, whose family was still in crisis, had adjustment scores that indicated disturbance. The others had normal, or better than normal scores. Here, we examine the circumstances of four of these families, and the ways in which the correlates of adjustment that we have noted play a part in particular family settings.

Theo

Theo is one of five brothers. His Lithuanian parents had been together for 25 years before his mother filed for divorce. His father, a hard-drinking sometimes violent man, refused to move out of the house until he was finally served with an injunction. For the previous 12 months Theo's parents, like those of Felicity, had been officially 'separated under the same roof'. We interviewed Theo a few days after his father had moved out of the family home in one of Sydney's southern suburbs.

Theo's mother was devoted to her sons and over the years his father had become a marginal member of the family, seeking to maintain his position

by enforcing an authoritarian discipline. Now, according to his wife, he is no match for his sons who are 'brighter, taller, better educated . . .'.

Theo's adjustment scores reflect the stress of the family situation. His mother's anxiety levels are exceptionally high and her physical health seems to have suffered from the prolonged strain of living with so much anger and tension. She falls in the normal range on both the parent bonding scales. Theo sees his father as exceptionally low in 'care'. The 'family sculpture' clearly depicts the family. The brothers are grouped around their mother in one corner of the board; their father stands in the furthest corner, his back to them.

Theo's interview shows that he is concerned about his mother, and angry with his father, but there are also traces of deep sadness about the break-up of the family: 'I used to ask him about my problems — but now I just can't talk to him.' He is glad that his father has finally left home, believing that the family will be happier, but is sad that now he 'no longer has a father'.

It seems that Theo's adjustment scores and declining school performance are the result of the family crisis which is still so close. His mother reports that he is normally a 'lovable, independent, funny boy' who gets on well with his school-mates and his brothers. It is hard to say whether things will improve now that his father has moved out. Crisis theory (Caplan, 1961) suggests that a recovery will probably begin to occur, given favourable conditions and available emotional support, but one cannot tell with certainty what the long-term effects will be.

Theo is one of a group of adolescents placing their allegiance firmly with one parent; these children do not experience the loyalty conflicts of Mark and Felicity. There may be very good reasons for wishing to turn one's back on an abusive or rejecting parent. One wonders, however, whether the rigid dichotomy between the 'good' and 'bad' parent will provide an unrealistic model for conflict resolution in future relationships. Such an experience may restrict the ability to be open-minded and may provide a rather rigid approach to other people. Theo values family life and hopes to marry when he is 22 or 23 and when he has found the right person.

His advice to divorcing parents is, 'Tell the children what is going to happen'; and to children, 'Help your mother or father through it'.

Vicki, Scott and Robert are aged 16. Each has been through extremely difficult family experiences and yet their adjustment scores show few signs of disturbance. In each case they are relieved that the family turbulance has ended. Life is much happier for them now.

Vicki

When Vicki was interviewed her mother apologised for offering coffee in a cup without a saucer; her ex-husband had smashed most of the crockery, and a good deal of the furniture too.

Vicki's mother was 19 when she married. Eight years and three children later her husband left her for another woman. She felt 'shattered, alone, frightened, desperate'. Some years later she married again. Her second

husband turned out to be a paranoid psychotic who was in and out of gaol for most of their marriage. During this time he repeatedly beat up his wife.

Drunk or sober he'd take to me. Bashed continuously. In the last period it was five times in five months. Broken arm, ribs, nose, cheek, head split open with a brick. Threw knives at me, burnt cigarettes on me.'

Vicki witnessed some of the violence, but went to live with her father and stepmother for most of this time. She found herself in conflict with her stepmother and worried continuously about her mother.

The family situation has now greatly improved, though her mother still lives in fear of Vicki's stepfather, despite a court order restraining him from contacting her. The divorce has been finalised, and Vicki and one of her brothers live with their mother.

Vicki's mother has high anxiety scores. Vicki has scores within the normal range on all the adjustment measures although the 'anxiety' sub-scale of the NSQ is rather higher than average and anxiety is also evident in the nightmares she experiences from time to time.

Vicki is an attractive, articulate and talented girl. She left school shortly before we interviewed her and had found a good job. She says she feels happy and free now that she is living at home again. The PBI places her mother in the optimal bonding category — highly caring and non-intrusive. Vicki writes of her:

'My mother treats me like an adult. We talk about our problems regularly and often go out together. My friends like her as she is 'young' for her age and understands most of us.'

She also has a supportive boyfriend:

'I have someone to confide in and I'm close to him. He'd be my best friend — everywhere I go he goes with me — I'm never on my own.'

Vicki arranges the 'family sculpture', with her boyfriend included, close to herself and her mother. Her biological father is 'on the outside looking in', but her formidable stepfather is relegated to a distant corner of the board with his back to the family. Vicki explains: 'He is a little "nothing" so I've chosen a really small figure. He's excluded'.

Vicki believes that her experiences have made her more mature and given her more understanding of the realities of life than children whose parents are together. Among her own circle of friends she says about 80 per cent are from divorced families. They understand one another's problems, and have more sense of how to handle money than adolescents from intact families whom she sees as spoilt and immature in many cases. Vicki's experiences have not put her off the idea of marriage; she hopes to marry at about 22 or 23, provided she has found the right person, and he has a steady job.

Vicki has come through her difficult childhood with considerable strength — indeed, her mother sees her as the main strength of the family.

That she is caring and empathic is shown by her advice to other families in the process of divorcing:

'When you separate you need to show your children more love — they begin to feel neglected and rejected. And children should show their parents a lot of understanding and love and help.'

Clearly her experiences have left their mark on Vicki, as the traces of anxiety show, but she is a well-functioning adolescent. The warm but not over-intrusive relationship with her mother, her close ties with her boyfriend, a group of understanding friends, her new job, and the changed family situation have all contributed to this progress.

Scott

Scott is an only child and until his parents' marriage began to go wrong he spent a lot of time with his father and his father's brother's family.

His parents' marriage seems to have been a turbulent one, with traces of disturbance going back for years. His father began to behave erratically when Scott's mother finally told him she wanted a divorce; he harrassed his wife and son and Scott began to be afraid of him. Scott's uncle took his father's side and the family split apart. For several months the family remained separated under the same roof until Scott's mother sought an injunction restraining her husband from entering the matrimonial home and harrassing herself or her son.

Scott's father is angry, upset and confused by his family break-up, with his adjustment scores revealing anxiety and depression. He is lonely and feels hurt and rejected by his son whom he has not seen for nearly a year: 'I only hear rumours about him. I've heard he's got an ear-ring in one ear. I wouldn't have agreed to that!'

Scott's mother is a youthful, animated woman who enjoys rock music and feels at home with Scott's friends. She disagreed with her husband on how parents should handle their teenagers:

'You've got to have a lot of understanding with kids because of their age. You need to give them a lot of freedom but still have discipline — they've got to develop their own personality. You've got to give kids trust — be very open with them — accept the things they tell you even when you don't like it.'

She says that her son is more responsible with a more adult outlook than many other adolescents because 'he hasn't got the problem of wanting to rebel'.

Scott was very shaken by the events surrounding his parents' separation. He felt 'caught in the middle of the two of them . . . it used to get really confusing . . . there'd be different stories . . . I used to believe what I saw'.

He's sad 'there's not one big family any more — my Mum and Dad and my cousins and their Mum and Dad'. But he thinks things are better than they were: 'Mum's not grouchy and unhappy like she used to be. She doesn't have to come home to arguments and that sort of thing'. At the moment he doesn't think he'll want to get married: 'Because of what's going on with Mum and Dad, it seems a lot of hassle. Happens to a lot of people'.

Scott is a gregarious boy, 'the hub of the wheel' his father calls him. His friends were a source of reassurance and protection when the family troubles were at their worst: 'Because they're the same age you can talk to them and they understand — a fair few of them, their parents are separated too'.

Like many of the other adolescents, Scott believes it is important for teenagers to understand what is going on. He tells other divorcing parents:

'Don't push the kids around. Don't worry them. Don't tell them who's good and who's bad. Let them figure it out, and who they want to live with.'

To the teenagers the message is similar:

'Try to keep control. Don't get too upset about what's going on. Try to work things out and see what's happening, and try to let yourself know where you stand.'

Robert

Sometimes an adolescent is aware of troubles in the family before one of the parents knows about them. Robert lives with his mother and two sisters in a rambling old house in the Eastern suburbs. He talks of 'the nightmare and burden' of the period before his mother discovered the existence of a sexual relationship between him and his father. In her interview his mother tells of the enormous tension between father and son which she had not been able to understand.

The circumstances of the separation were traumatic. The day after she learned of the incestuous relationship, Robert's mother sought an injunction preventing her husband from entering the family home. A marriage of 20 years ended literally overnight.

Robert recalls his relief when the separation took place and also his anxiety on his mother's behalf:

'I didn't want to hurt Mum, and in that way I didn't want a separation, but I was relieved it happened. I worry about her — how she's coped with the separation — because she's lost a husband.'

Robert sees the family as closer than it used to be:

'The most impressive change is that Mum, myself and my sisters are much closer than before when we were together as a family with Dad.'

When setting out the 'family sculpture', Robert includes his girlfriend as part of the family — she is close beside him facing, as he does, towards his mother. His father is far away at the other end of the board.

Robert's scores on the measures of adjustment are well within normal limits, and even the anxiety scale of the NSQ shows no disturbance. Robert preferred not fill out a PBI for his father. His scores for his mother show her to be caring and non-intrusive. He values the open communication he has with her: 'I can discuss mostly anything with her — I think it's great that she trusts me enough to talk about her problems too'. His feelings towards his father are angry and confused.

His mother reports that Robert was difficult to handle before and immediately after the separation, but the freedom from tension since his father left home seems to have helped him to become more positive and relaxed.

Robert hopes to marry when he is older. He says the right time is when you feel yourself to be personally mature. His message to divorcing parents is, 'Give your children support — talk about things openly'; and to the children, 'Give parents support — parents are hurting too — don't expect parents to be perfect'.

Common themes

In a short-term study we cannot say with certainty what the long-term effects of severe family disturbance will be. The four cases we have looked at suggest, however, that children respond in a remarkable way when family conflicts and tension are removed.

It seems that the worst predicament for a child is to feel trapped in a bad situation from which he or she can find no escape. Provision of an alternative gives the child room to grow. This effect, emerging clearly from the preceding extreme cases, is also present in the four cases we examined in the previous chapter. It is repeated among other families in our sample where a child perceives the family situation to be less happy than before. Sometimes he or she feels trapped by having to live with an overprotective or unreasonably restrictive parent who may be unconsciously using the child to compensate for the failed marriage.

We have seen that it is the child's perception of the family situation that is most closely related to adjustment. At adolescence children are capable of understanding complex relationships and they need to make sense of the events which are affecting their lives. A common theme emerging from these cases is the high value adolescents attach to parents who explain what is happening to the family. At the same time they warn other children not to get drawn into disputes between parents but to keep a little distant and make up their own minds about events.

The ability to understand the point of view of another person is another aspect of the cognitive maturity of the adolescent. This emerges in the moving way in which teenagers advise other adolescents experiencing divorce to try not to take events personally but to give their parents support and understanding because 'parents are hurting too'.

Another aspect of adolescence is the way in which the teenagers responded to being treated as capable of handling independence and responsibility. Both parents and children commented on the changed relationship between them as a result of the divorce. Acceptance by parents of adolescents' capacity to understand adult problems seemed to bring with it more understanding of their need for independence. A more equal and companionable relationship had developed to the mutual satisfaction of many of these parents and their children.

What has Helped the Well Adjusted Teenagers to Cope Well with Their Family Upheavals?

The case histories show clearly the complexity of the experience of divorce. It is not an area where simple linear relationships exist between one variable and another. The mix of circumstances is different in each case, yet some common strands run through them all.

There is a tendency for the well-adjusted boys and girls in the sample to feel that they have achieved a more adult relationship with their parents since the separation — especially with the custodial parent. Both sexes value this.

Most of the well-adjusted teenagers have at least one parent whom they see as caring and not over-intrusive. Such a relationship supplies emotional support while promoting independence and autonomy. It acts as a buffer to the events of the divorce and is clearly an enormous benefit to the teenager. Support from a special boyfriend or girlfriend or from other youngsters who have been through similar experiences provides additional sources of strength for many teenagers.

The teenagers who have made the best adjustment are those able to recreate their family despite its geographical separation. For these adolescents the concept of 'the broken home' is inappropriate; their family is still a psychological reality although they accept the changes in its structure.

The family inevitably takes on a new function for the normal adolescent who is moving out into the world. Teenagers who adjusted well to the divorce seem to have used strengths congruent with normal adolescent growth. As relationships with parents have become more adult, there has been a lessening of dependence and a turning towards friendships and interests beyond the family circle. Ties with parents often remain important, but they have changed — parents have become people, and adolescents have learned that just because the family has altered 'you don't have to think the world is caving in'.

Among these teenagers is a certain wariness about the future. Some have reservations about marriage, and nearly all stress the need to 'be sure you've found the right person'. Despite — or perhaps because of — their experiences almost all value family life highly, and most plan to marry themselves one day. They have learned to be discerning about people, and have lost their childhood idealisation of their parents. But many see this as a step forward into adulthood — they say they have gained a more realistic understanding of human nature which will help them in their own future relationships.

As a group, the adolescents we interviewed were impressively concerned about and understanding of their parents' problems, and most were facing their own difficulties with independence and courage.

11

ADOLESCENT PERSPECTIVES

On looking at individual cases, one is struck by the diversity of ways in which a child can experience family break-up and the different personal meaning lying behind seemingly similar events. The case histories exemplify some of the ways in which themes emerging from the statistical analysis are woven into individual lives. In this chapter we hope to draw these themes together.

Perception of Family Change

In Chapter 6 it was found that the clearest predictor of adolescent adjustment was whether or not the family was seen as happier and less conflictual following separation. The case histories show clearly that some children are blooming in a family atmosphere that is happier than it has been for years, while others still find themselves trapped in a climate of tension and hostility; for most, a gradual process of recovery from family crisis seems to have been taking place.

In some cases, however, resolution has been prevented by the inability of parents to disengage from one another, or because the family is still living under the same roof. Of the five families using the latter arrangement for the full 12 months prior to divorce, four adolescents showed evidence of elevated scores on one or more of the adjustment measures. A girl describes a pervasive atmosphere of conflict where she is faced with:

'Trying to keep everything on an even keel and everyone not fighting . . . keeping calm so we can get on with what we're doing. Trying not to do badly at school or work because you're worried about things at home.'

Whether a family was under the same roof or not, overt hostility between parents was highly painful to adolescents. They comment:

'Try not to have your battles in front of the kids — it's traumatic seeing parents fight.'

'Whatever you do don't start raving and screaming. Keep away from each other rather than do that.'

'Don't turn around and say "your father did this, your father did that, he's a bastard of a bloke". I think that's wrong.'

Although some teenagers sided with one parent, most were determined to stay out of their parents' disputes, and deeply resented attempts to enlist them on one side or the other:

'Dad was always trying to denigrate Mum when I visited him. They each do it to the other, but Mum does it less.'

'I see parents as immature when they use kids to get back at each other. Whenever Mum and Dad have a backstab at each other I tell them what they're up to and how silly it is.'

Their advice to other adolescents going through family separation reflects the same theme:

'Love them both, not just one of them. Try to help them both.'

'Try not to get involved.'

The interviews show just how painful parental conflict is to children, and it is not surprising that prolonged hostility is linked to poor adjustment. The case histories show that the process of reconstruction begins to occur even before the divorce comes through, where the family climate permits it. High levels of continuing conflict prevent this process, making it difficult for adolescents to maintain the objective stance most clearly desire. Tension frequently escalates when parents remain under the same roof.

Feelings about the Separation

Ninety per cent of the adolescents reported feeling sad when their parents parted. Over half were shocked and found it hard to believe that the break-up was taking place. A similar proportion felt angry with one parent, and a third were at least a little angry with both. Nearly a third wondered a little if they had been to blame, and about a quarter reported feeling rejected by the parent who had left.

Australian adolescents — like Australian adults — are somewhat reticent about revealing their feelings. We did not encounter the open displays of strong emotion reported by Wallerstein and Kelly (1980). However, it is clear that many had gone through a period of confusion, anger and distress when the family crisis was at its height. At the same time, many expressed some relief at the lessening of family tension. Forty per cent were at least a little glad that the separation had taken place:

'I was relieved and happier than before — although I didn't want Mum to know I was happy because she was pretty cut up about things.'

'I thought, "Great — no more arguing!" I couldn't wait for a permanent arrangement . . . I kept thinking that maybe he'd come back and they'd start arguing again.'

Seventy-seven per cent of the adolescents said they were 'upset at first, but now OK'. This change is reflected in the following comments:

'It was horrible. You miss your Mum. She was always upset when I saw her. And so was Dad. This lasted about a whole year.'

'I've got used to it now. As far as I'm concerned this is my family arrangement. Just as other kids have got their family in one place, mine is in two difference places, and that's just how it is.'

Coping with Family Crisis

Mitchell (1983) reports that few of the 50 adolescents she interviewed in Edinburgh believed they had been offered sufficient explanation when their parents divorced four to five years previously. Only 38 per cent of the parents she interviewed reported that they had given *any* explanation to their children.

Parents who are overwhelmed with their own pain do not always realise the importance of explaining to their children what is happening. Some feel that adolescents are too young to understand adult problems, or they find it too difficult to explain why the separation has come about. Sometimes children are confronted with the collapse of their family with absolutely no prior warning:

'I didn't realise at all until the day. In the morning I woke up and my sister was there crying . . . Dad told me Mum was leaving and she left that morning with my brother and sister. Dad asked me what I wanted to do and I said I'd stay because I got on better with Dad.' (Boy)

'I never really knew. Mum told me and I was really mad with her. I said, "You could have told me something was going on".' (Girl)

The need for explanation is very real at adolescence, when children reach a stage of adult reasoning ability. Unlike younger children, most adolescents have a highly developed ability to see things from the point of view of other people, and to understand conflicting motives and needs. As Taylor (1983) points out, finding meaning in a difficult life crisis is an important step in coping with it.

The need to understand comes out clearly in the responses to the following open-ended questions: If you knew a family who was about to separate, what advice would you give to the parents on how to help their children? And what advice would you give to the children?

Almost half the adolescents replied that the best kind of help parents could give was to explain things to their children:

'Sit down and discuss it with them. Explain it fully so they understand it.'

'Don't spring it on them — slowly let them realise that everything isn't going to be fantastic.'

'Don't hide anything from them. Explain everything *and I mean* everything*! Be totally honest.'*

The same need for understanding was foremost in their advice to other children:

'Try and understand both sides. Try to find an understanding in it because there's a reason why the whole thing happened. Try to think of them and their life, and not just what you are missing out.'

'Sort of put yourself in your parents' position and see what they would think and do.'

'Try and work things out and see what's happening and try and let yourself know where you stand.'

Sources of Support

We asked the adolescents if they had any people they could talk to about their family problems, who the best person was, and whether the best person really understood and cared.

Eighty per cent had at least one person they could talk to, although the remaining 20 per cent had to handle the family crisis alone. Most found that friends provided the best means of emotional support. Same-sex friends lent a sympathetic ear for about 40 per cent, and boy or girlfriends provided emotional help to about 20 per cent of the teenagers. Friends who had themselves experienced family break-up were able to provide empathic understanding. A boy commented:

'A friend at school, he had the same problem with his parents and we could talk about what we would really like to happen. Just wished they wouldn't *— and would be more like most parents and be really nice to each other.'*

Others found family members helpful at this time. Nearly a quarter said their mothers had helped them understand the break-up, but only two saw their fathers as the best people to talk to. Partisan support was not appreciated:

'I talked to my girlfriend and my grandmother — but my grandmother was just telling me Mum's point of view and not really caring about how Dad feels too. My girlfriend understood more what I was going through.'

Of the 20 per cent who said they had no-one to talk to, most would have liked some help:

'I would have liked help but I was younger then and didn't really know what to do.'

'I would have liked to talk to a counsellor alone, without my Mum and Dad there too.'

'Sometimes teenagers think that they can handle it but it's just a front. A counsellor figure to help them let go what they've bottled up inside would help. Or for two people going through the same sort of problem to talk — maybe with a counsellor to lead them.'

Divorce-related Changes

We were interested to know what the teenagers had experienced as the biggest change that separation had brought to their lives. We had expected most answers would be in terms of physical changes, such as coping with new schools, or financial hardships. Instead, the most common group of answers concerned the adolescents' view of themselves as having grown up more quickly as a consequence of the divorce. In Chapter 7 we failed to find any measurable difference in levels of maturity between the children in non-divorcing and divorcing homes. The material presented here indicates the more subtle ways in which adolescents feel that divorce has affected their maturity:

'I always relied on Mum and Dad. It's made me grow up a bit — in understanding, what problems are, what they were going through. I like it — being able to do things for myself.'

'It's made me realise more about what goes on in people's relationships.'

'It's made me see a lot of things differently and clearer. Like problems before at home. Mum wouldn't talk to me about it — now any problems we talk out together.'

A number of adolescents said the separation had altered their relationship with their parents for the better:

'I feel closer to Mum. I'm treated like an adult here.'

'Both Mum and Dad know what I'm doing. It's made them see me as an individual.'

For some there was a shift away from seeing parents as idealised figures:

'My big brother was disappointed to find out that Dad wasn't perfect — but I've found out much younger.'

Often circumstances forced youngsters to stand on their own feet:

'I had to grow up emotionally — spending more time with friends. Also with my boyfriend — turning to him for affection.'

'. . . more responsibilities with family problems and that . . . more sense of how to handle money.'

A few had taken on responsibilities far in excess of those in intact families. Pam, aged 16, described her mother as 'going through the middle-age syndrome — total confusion'. Her mother had taken up with an alcoholic boyfriend after the separation. Pam commented:

'He was creepy. We had the same policeman each time he crashed through the door. We used to laugh with the policeman — but it wasn't funny really — I worried that I'd come home and find Mum stabbed and bloody in the flat . . . I sometimes feel responsible for her, but it's not my business.'

This girl had left school and was 'bringing home the bread' until her mother could find a job.

There was also a pervasive, though subdued, note of anxiety about their own future relationships among both boys and girls:

'I just think about what's going to happen in the future more . . . I don't want my marriage to break down.'

'I'm a lot more determined to do things, job-wise, career, to make sure I don't get a divorce — that it doesn't happen to me.'

Despite concern about the future, the overwhelming majority wanted to get married one day. Eighty per cent of the adolescents in each group of families expected they would marry.

In both groups of families, as we have shown, adolescents are maturing in an age-related way. Divorce seems to alter parent–child relationships and bring changes to children's lives in subtle ways. There is a welcome sense of being accepted as a young adult, but there is also a sobering awareness of the harshness of adult life and sometimes a burden of excessive responsibility.

Many of the youngsters themselves regard their experience as having accelerated their maturity in ways that make them more understanding, more worldly wise, and better prepared for the problems of adult life than their contemporaries.

Acceptance of the Separation

Although almost a third would like to see their parents together again, 97 per cent of the teenagers accept that it is highly unlikely that they will re-unite, and 89 per cent believe that the decision to part was the right one for their parents. The cognitive maturity of adolescents is illustrated in their ability to separate their own interests from a broader view of the marriage. Again, we cite advice given to other children of divorce:

'Tell them that their mother and father are doing it for their own sake, so they have *to do it because they can't go on being unhappy.'*

'Try to support the parents and try not to influence them. Help them to overcome the sadness of the separation if that's the decision, or help them to rebuild if that's what they want.'

'It would be wrong to try to get them to stay together. Everything is a lot happier if people are more content — and that includes themselves.'

'Stick by them. If your mother was crying go in and comfort her and things like that . . . Love them both, not just one of them. Try to help them both.'

It is sometimes considered that the child who expresses strong concern for a parent may be in danger of becoming locked in to a reversed parenting role. Our findings, however, suggest that concern for parents is a common

response among normal adolescents and can serve a useful function in the process of understanding and coming to terms with the divorce.

Adolescent Developmental Strengths

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) found a high level of unhappiness among their adolescents, accompanied by feelings of anger, shame, embarrassment and anxiety over their own futures. This is attributed to 'the extraordinary cog-wheeling of the divorce-related changes in the parent–child relationship with those issues which cause adolescents intense concern in the normal course of events' (p.85).

While clearly there are dangers that an adolescent may be forced too rapidly into adult responsibilities, or may find a divorcing parent's emotional investment burdensome or restrictive, it seems that Wallerstein and Kelly have tended to over-emphasise the negative aspect of the conjunction of these events. The essentially clinical nature of their sample and the absence of a comparison group may have led them to these conclusions while obscuring the real coping strengths that this stage of development provides.

Our main findings show no difference in adjustment between adolescents from intact and separated families. If divorce interacted with adolescent development and disrupted it as severely as Wallerstein and Kelly suggest, one would expect to find significantly poorer adjustment among these children.

Wallerstein and Kelly point out that divorce may accelerate the normal process of individuating parents and separating emotionally from the family. Their fear is that this process may be too sudden and too rapid. We would argue that precisely because these processes are part of adolescence, teenagers can use them in coping with separation. Children are pushing for independence in both groups. Parents in the intact group, however, seem more anxious about how much freedom to give and how soon. In the divorcing group, conflicts over independence often seem to resolve themselves as relationships with parents change. More than half these adolescents report having no problems over independence struggles compared with 34 per cent from the dual-parent homes.

Wallerstein and Kelly are concerned that changed relationships with parents will result in infringement of generational boundaries — a concern heightened by the theoretical position of these writers who hold the psychoanalytic view that adolescence is a peculiarly vulnerable period when Oedipal conflicts are likely to re-emerge.

We have observed a change in parent–child relationships, but we do not see dangers in this change. Many teenagers commented that as they had gained more independence they had also achieved a better relationship with

one, or both, parents — closer, more equal and with better communication. It seems that in both types of family, as a child's understanding increases it is understandable and desirable that the relationship should become more equal. This does not mean that parents abandon their responsibilities, but that their style of parenting takes account of the adolescent's increasing maturity and need for autonomy. The results of the analysis of family processes reported in Chapter 5 confirm this point.

Because adolescents are moving out into the world they have more resources at their disposal than younger children. They have friends of both sexes and access to adults beyond the family circle. They also have greater competence and mobility. The family and its troubles are not their whole world.

For these reasons, and because of the emotional and cognitive maturity of adolescents, adults can draw upon these developmental strengths to help teenagers cope with separation.

Part Three

APPLICATION OF THE RESULTS

12

SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

Drawing together both parts of this report, we have found that although divorce is a painful experience that may influence a child's outlook on life in significant ways, adolescents from divorcing families are no more likely to be psychologically maladjusted than those from non-divorcing families. In both types of family there are well-adjusted children, but there are also vulnerable teenagers who are more disturbed.

We cannot with certainty pinpoint all the determinants of adolescent disturbance. Some may be intrinsic to the child. However, we have shown that high family conflict is linked to poor adjustment in intact families and also where hostility continues after divorce. When divorce ends a bad situation and the adolescent sees the family as happier than before, he or she seems to respond in a remarkable way, even after severe family disturbance.

The quality of an adolescent's relationship with his or her mother and father has an important influence on a child's level of adjustment. The caring parent who encourages appropriate independence provides the best environment to meet the adolescent's needs. Especially in divorce, overprotection and a too intrusive style of parenting is associated with poorer psychological health. Perhaps, as Anthony (1974b) believes, encouraging autonomy enhances the ability of a child to cope with crisis.

In both groups of families, adolescent development was linked to age. But divorce brought experiences which affected maturity in rather subtle ways. Changes occurred in relationships with parents, and adolescents became more wary and realistic about adult life than their non-divorcing friends.

From the interviews we found that understanding the capabilities and needs of adolescents revealed strengths which could be drawn upon to help them cope with the sadness and disruption of divorce. We now put forward some suggestions for the application of our findings by parents and by those who frame policies. These areas are difficult, but we take a position of child advocacy, proposing steps to minimise distress where possible.

Points for Parents

Preparing for separation

Children are people whose lives are fundamentally altered by their parents' decision to part. Clearly, every child would prefer a happy family where parents get on well and stay together; however, adolescents are able to understand that where a marriage simply does not work, parents are better off apart. Adolescents are entitled to a careful explanation of the reasons for the breakdown of the marriage and the consequences of this decision for their own future. They have the capacity to understand, and need to make sense of this major life event in order to help them cope with it. Uncertainty is stressful, so explanations which carry reassurances about adequate and acceptable plans for the future will help allay anxiety.

Taking sides

Explanations, where possible, should not be one-sided. Adolescents resent being put in a position where they are forced to side with one parent against the other. The child's biological tie with each parent can never be severed, and emotional bonds formed over 13 years or more are powerful. Appeals for support may result in later rejection if a teenager believes that he or she has to choose between one or other parent. Adolescents often go to considerable lengths to maintain an even-handed position. When a child's need to remain neutral is respected, he or she is able to make a far more satisfactory recovery than the teenager who finds him or herself 'caught in the middle'.

Conflict

Because of the link that we and other researchers have found between continued levels of high conflict and poor child adjustment, any arrangements that can reduce the exposure of adolescents to this kind of stress should be made. Where possible, attempts to reach agreement about custody and access should be made without recourse to the court. The Court Counselling service is available for those who wish for professional assistance in coming to an agreement. Where conflicts cannot be solved and the case goes to a judicial decision it should be understood that judges can rarely satisfy both parties to a dispute equally. Further bitterness and resentment may ensue, with the possibility of more court cases. Protracted legal disputes involve the whole family in uncertainty and conflict. Such an atmosphere prevents crisis resolution and prolongs psychological stress for children.

Two cases of prolonged legal proceedings from our sample illustrate this point. An adolescent who had suffered sexual abuse believed (correctly) that exposure of the situation had triggered the separation of her parents.

Drawn-out litigation over the father's access to a younger sibling caused a continuing burden of anxiety and distress for this adolescent. A second case concerns a protracted property dispute. A 15 year-old feared that a wealthy father would find a way of cutting his family out of its entitlement. This adolescent deliberately took on a role as go-between, travelling a considerable distance to keep in touch with the father each week-end, in the belief that he would be forced to acknowledge his family responsibilities in this way.

There are no easy solutions for situations of this kind. All we can do is to point out to parents that adult conflicts may impact on adolescents in ways of which they are unaware, prolonging anxiety and preventing progress towards re-adjustment.

It is also important that decisions affecting the child's life should be made after careful consideration and in consultation with the adolescent. Impulsive decisions which have to be changed expose children to further uncertainty and distress.

Separation under the same roof

Financial difficulties may cause some people to be attracted to the solution of staying under the same roof during the 12-month waiting period before a divorce can be granted. However, parents should be aware that conflict is likely to escalate when a divorcing couple continues to live in the same house or flat, and that this may create a very stressful situation for children. In all but one of the families who chose this arrangement, both parents and adolescents experienced high levels of tension. We therefore do not recommend separation under the same roof where children and adolescents are involved, unless a high degree of cooperation is possible between parents.

Support

Parents who are caring and not overprotective can often provide good support to adolescent children during family crisis, but some children need reassurance and help in letting go of their feelings in a setting beyond the family. Adolescents who react by becoming withdrawn or who become angry and difficult to manage may find it helpful to talk to a professional counsellor. As many adolescents derive their best support from friends, especially those who are also children of divorce, the teenager who has few friends, or knows few other families who have separated, is likely to be in particular need of help.

Recovery from crisis

It is likely that an adolescent may need special support from friends and family during the height of the family crisis, and the recovery period may last for a year or more. If school work falls off and there are behaviour

problems and emotional difficulties, those in contact with the teenager need to understand that the process of recovery can take time. A period of mourning may be needed with special consideration at home and school.

Coping with change

Family break-up presents a major challenge to a child's coping ability. For some adolescents family break-up also means moving house, changing school, losing friends and having to get rid of family pets. Multiple changes add to the degree of adjustment that has to be faced. Many of our sample preferred to stay in the family home irrespective of which parent moved out. At adolescence, especially, a familiar world beyond the family provides a setting where family problems can be put aside. Continuity of surroundings, school, friends, and other social and sporting interests provides stability during the adjustment period.

Individual needs will, of course, depend on particular circumstances, but awareness of the value of familiar surroundings should be borne in mind when living and access arrangements are made for adolescents.

Custody and access

A high proportion of adolescents in our sample were living with their fathers (27 per cent). We found no difference in the adjustment of the child according to whether he or she was living with mother or father. It seems that the quality of the relationship is the most important factor, and that this involves both a high degree of care and also an understanding of the adolescent's growing need for independence and autonomy.

Most adolescents preferred a pattern of open access rather than a tightly organised routine. Open access, or at least a flexible pattern of visitation, allows them to fit visits to the non-custodial parent in with their own social and sporting plans. Again, this reflects the adolescent's need to construct his or her own life -- an important element in the process of growing up.

Our study shows that even at adolescence children often feel rejected by the parent who leaves home. Other research has stressed the importance of the non-custodial parent in a child's life. Where possible, and providing the adolescent wishes it, a continuing relationship with both parents is highly desirable. Communication between teenagers and parents (especially fathers) is not always good. Many departing parents probably have no idea how much they are still needed in the lives of their children.

Letting go

As we have seen, an adolescent can be a compassionate and responsible companion to a parent who is struggling to cope with separation. The change to a more equal relationship can be rewarding for both parent and child. It is also important to ensure that the adolescent does not take on

responsibilities that are too burdensome, and that he or she feels free to carry on with the normal agenda of growing up. Dependence on the adolescent can be restrictive if the parent leans too heavily or finds it hard to 'let go'.

Application to Policies

Court procedures and practices

The link between child disturbance and exposure to high levels of family conflict found in this study confirms the findings of overseas research. Our results suggest that conflict after separation delays or prevents the process of recovery from family crisis which normally seems to take from one to two years from the time that parents part. A year is a long time in the life of a child. Therefore, policies that reduce the exposure of children and adolescents to family conflict should be implemented.

Lengthy court delays in hearing property settlements and other divorce-related matters are likely to prolong family tension and hostility between parents. Reduction of delays should be an urgent priority.

The practice of allowing 'separation under the same roof' prior to divorce is likely to put children at risk. Living in close proximity with a ban on sexual relations after the intimacy of marriage is highly unsatisfactory, especially where one partner wishes to terminate the marriage and the other does not. Discussions with court counsellors support our view that this practice leads to high levels of hostility and tension likely to be injurious to children.

It is recognised that the practice of separation under the same roof has arisen for pragmatic reasons, but the inherent dangers to children should be borne in mind. We therefore recommend that the problems with this arrangement should be pointed out to court clients and the practice should be discouraged except in special circumstances.

Increased funds for Court counselling services should be made available in order to underpin the admirable policy that parents be encouraged to make their own joint decisions concerning custody and access rather than depend on a judicial decision. High quality counselling *before* and *after* divorce should be readily available at short notice. These services should be widely publicised, and geared to provide continuing personal support for all family members, as well as resolution of disputed matters. Both family and individual access to counsellors is desirable so that children have the opportunity to speak with counsellors without the presence of their parents if they so desire. Adequate funds for specialised training, research and evaluation of counselling services should be made available.

The strong link that has been found between adolescent self-image and the quality of parent–child relationships reinforces overseas and other Australian research. Court counsellors faced with making custody and access

recommendations may find the Parent Bonding Inventory (Parker and others, 1979) a useful adjunct to other methods of assessment. This standardised descriptive measure of a subject's relationship with each parent has been found to be reliable over three years (Dunlop and Burns, 1986). Our results suggest that strong consideration should be given to placing an adolescent with a parent seen as both caring and non-overprotective.

Information and support services

While information and support services for families in crisis are available, they are not always *locally* available and many people do not know about them.

Provision of more locally-based family support services and easily available counselling and workshop sessions for parents and for children and adolescents is desirable. While adolescents are sometimes reluctant to seek professional help, it seems that a real need for such help exists, but should be provided in a palatable way. Such workshops and counselling facilities could be provided in conjunction with teenage 'drop-in' or activity centres. The emphasis should be on general adolescent and family problems relevant to children in unhappy intact families as well as to those experiencing separation or adjusting to life in a stepfamily.

Education programs targeted both at parents and at young people should provide information about child development and parent–child relationships so that age-appropriate preparation and information can be given to children in divorce, and so that parenting practices in both intact and divorcing families can be pitched at a suitable level for children and adolescents.

Lack of knowledge about available support services suggests that a well-publicised central source of information would be useful to families in crisis. The present voluntary telephone counselling services go some way to meeting this need, but ignorance among our subjects about available help suggests that further information is required. A telephone service coordinating information about all family services and directing callers to local sources would be useful. Such a service should encompass both government and independent agencies, providing sources of information for ethnic minorities as well as English speakers. Relevant issues should include where to go for financial and social service advice, legal help, family and personal counselling, and the availability of crisis services and refuges.

Single-parent families and the schools

Teachers are often in the forefront of a child's reaction to trouble at home. Many observe the difficult behaviour and drop in school results of the adolescent experiencing family disruption. They also witness the behaviour of some deeply disturbed and rejected children. Children from separated homes who perform well and do not misbehave are far less visible.

Our results suggest that family crisis is frequently related to poor school adjustment, but that given understanding and support most children can pull through this difficult period. Parents know that many teachers regard children from broken homes as trouble-makers, and they are sometimes reluctant to let teachers know about the family situation in case the child becomes stigmatised, and has to carry a reputation which is hard to throw off. This is a pity, as concerned and understanding teachers can provide the stable support that an adolescent badly needs to cope with the crisis and regain lost ground.

It is important that teachers be fully aware of the research which shows that family structure — 'the child from the broken home' — is not the crucial variable, but that turbulent family relationships in both intact and separated families may lie behind a child's disturbance. Such disturbance may be a transitional response, requiring tolerance and understanding, or it may be symptomatic of long-term family pathology requiring professional help.

Conclusion

This study concerns some of the thousands of families going through the Family Court of Australia every year. We cannot speak for all adolescents who experience family break-up. Our sample somewhat under-represents the very poor. Nor did our youngsters feel rejected and abandoned by both parents. We accept, however, that our sample represents many families who seek divorce each year. We are optimistic enough to believe that most parents in Australia care about their children and are concerned that they should survive divorce with the minimum of hurt.

Our findings should give comfort to these parents. They show that given a caring and autonomous relationship with at least one parent (and preferably two), adolescents can cope with separation with resilience and courage, provided they are not exposed to protracted family conflict following divorce. Family break-up is a sad and confusing time, but recovery can and does take place.

We know less about the long-term effects of separation at adolescence on the adjustment, attitudes and personal relationships of young people. A three-year follow-up of the present study is being undertaken to find out how these families have fared over time.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1:

Demographic Characteristics of the Population from which the Control Group of Families Were Drawn and Number of Acceptances per School

	% Blue collar workers by municipality	% White collar workers by municipality	% Divorce rate by municipality	Number accepting by municipality	% of total acceptances
Leumeah High School	70.3	29.7	1.9	23	17.83
Strathfield South High School	60.1	39.9	3.1	19	14.73
St. Ives High School	26.3	73.7	2.1	24	18.60
Mosman High School	34.4	65.6	5.0	22	17.05
Ryde High School	60.2	39.8	2.8	11	8.53
Narrabeen High School	55.2	44.8	3.6	7	5.43
Arthur Phillip High School Parramatta	69.9	30.1	3.1	6	4.65
Rooty Hill High School	79.8	20.2	2.4	17	13.18

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics data as presented by Poulsen and Spearritt, 1981

Appendix 2:

Comparisons of Intact and Divorcing Group Scores on Standard Psychometric Measures with Published Norms: Means and Standard Deviations

Table A2.1: Norm comparisons: Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale: Australian married couples versus intact group parents

Scale	Males				Females			
	(n = 108) *Antill & Cotton*		(n = 39) *Intact Parents*		(n = 108) *Antill & Cotton*		(n = 41) *Intact Parents*	
	$\bar{x}$	sd	$\bar{x}$	sd	$\bar{x}$	sd	$\bar{x}$	sd
Consensus	48.2	6.2	51.84***	5.14	49.4	7.2	51.48	6.78
Affection	8.6	2.0	10.13***	1.58	8.9	2.0	12.10***	13.7
Satisfaction	39.6	4.3	41.15*	4.85	38.7	6.1	40.68	5.11
Cohesion	15.2	4.2	16.85*	3.99	15.7	3.8	15.02	3.93
Total	111.6	13.5	117.26*	14.3	112.7	15.5	113.85	31.3

(* = $p<.05$; ** = $p<.01$; *** = $p<.001$)

Note: Because of multiple comparisons the appropriate significance level is alpha = .01. Higher scores denote greater marital satisfaction.

Source: Antill and Cotton, 1982.

Table A2.2: Norm comparisons: Offer Self Image Questionnaire (OSIQ) Subscales and Total: Australian male adolescents versus intact and divorcing group adolescent males

Scale	Norm (n = 687)		Intact Group (n = 21)		Divorcing Group (n = 18)	
	x̄	sd	x̄	sd	x̄	sd
Impulse control	2.43	.81	2.62	.67	2.70	.48
Emotional tone	2.29	.78	2.19	.70	2.18	.64
Body and Self-image	2.68	.80	2.69	.69	2.59	.76
Social relationships	2.31	.79	2.34	.57	2.30	.67
Morals	2.55	.67	2.74	.58	2.56	.46
Sexual attitudes	2.52	.82	2.90	.68	2.60	.51
Family relationships	2.33	.75	2.30	.64	2.49	.81
Mastery of the external world	2.45	.66	2.41	.52	2.41	.72
Vocational and educational goals	1.99	.64	1.92	.64	2.01	.63
Psychopathology	2.51	.69	2.44	.67	2.33	.64
Superior adjustment	2.66	.59	2.68	.53	2.62	.43
Offer Total	2.42	.52	2.43	.44	2.42	.43

Note: Following the practice of Offer, Ostrov and Howard, the Sexual Attitudes scores are omitted from the total Offer Score. Lower scores denote better adjustment. No significant differences were found.

Source: Offer, Ostrov and Howard, 1977.

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Table A2.4: Norm comparisons: Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire (NSQ): American adults versus intact and divorcing group adolescent males and females

Males						Females					
Norm (n = 675)		*Intact* (n = 22)		*Divorcing* (n = 19)		*Norm* (n = 393)		*Intact* (n = 19)		*Divorcing* (n = 18)	
x̄	sd	x̄	sd	x̄	sd	x̄	sd	x̄	sd	x̄	sd
39.20	7.40	35.73*	5.93	39.55	8.27	45.10	7.10	41.84*	6.97	41.13*	6.97

(*p = <.05)

Note: These norms are based on a population whose mean age is 31 years. Lower scores denote better adjustment.

Source: Scheier and Cattell, 1961. Mean raw scores (total) are reported.

Table A2.3: Norm comparisons: Offer Self Image Questionnaire (OSIQ) Subscales and Total: Australian female adolescents versus intact and divorcing group adolescent females

Scale	Norm (n = 687)		Intact Group (n = 19)		Divorcing Group (n = 16)	
	x̄	sd	x̄	sd	x̄	sd
Impulse control	2.70	.83	2.83	.70	2.86	.62
Emotional tone	2.64	.86	2.33	.76	2.39	.75
Body and Self-image	2.92	.73	2.76	.81	2.98	.87
Social relationships	2.48	.83	2.50	.70	2.47	.66
Morals	2.37	.69	2.46	.60	2.37	.61
Sexual attitudes	2.94	.80	3.35*	.78	2.83	.82
Family relationships	2.49	.90	2.20	.85	2.43	.53
Mastery of the external world	2.58	.66	2.54	.58	2.38	.44
Vocational and educational goals	2.05	.60	1.99	.54	2.19	.44
Psychopathology	2.70	.71	2.70	.65	2.46	.59
Superior adjustment	2.74	.57	2.70	.50	2.78	.56
Offer Total	2.57	.52	2.50	.44	2.53	.46

(*p = < .05)

Note: Following the practice of Offer, Ostrov and Howard, the Sexual Attitudes scores are omitted from the total Offer Score. Lower scores denote better adjustment.
No significant differences were found.

Source: Offer, Ostrov and Howard, 1977.

Table A2.5: Norm comparisons: Langner Twenty-two Item Psychiatric Screening Score: American adults versus intact and divorcing group adolescents

Norm (n = 1438)		*Intact Group* (n = 41)		*Divorcing Group* (n = 36)		*Total Sample* (n = 77)	
x̄	sd	x̄	sd	x̄	sd	x̄	sd
2.60	2.67	2.85	2.74	2.72	2.85	2.79	2.78

Note: A cut-off point of 4 symptoms will identify 84.4% of clinically disturbed members of a population. Lower scores denote better adjustment.
No significant differences were found.

Source: Langner, 1962.

Table A2.6: Norm comparisons: Parent Bonding Inventory (PBI): Young Australian adults versus intact and divorcing group adolescents

Scales	*Parker's norms*	(n = 41) *Intact families*		(n = 36) *Divorcing families*	
	$\bar{x}$	$\bar{x}$	sd	$\bar{x}$	sd
Mother's care	27.0	29.10*	5.81	29.31**	4.60
Father's care	24.0	27.25**	6.57	22.31	8.41
Mother's overprotection	13.5	12.73	8.16	11.66	7.41
Father's overprotection	12.5	11.98	8.23	12.00	7.36

(*p = .05 ; **p = .01)

Note: These norms are based on scores of young Australian adults rating parents retrospectively. Higher Care scores denote satisfactory bonding, while higher Overprotection indicates poorer bonding.

Source: Parker, 1979

Appendix 3:

Offer Self-Image Questionnaire Scores According to Number of 'Optimal' Parents (i.e. rated high in care and low in overprotection on parent bonding inventory scales)

Table A3.1: Means, standard deviations and frequencies by family group and sex of adolescent

		Boys			*Girls*		
	Number of optimal parents	$\bar{x}$	sd	n	$\bar{x}$	sd	n
Intact families	Both parents	2.3	.30	7	2.4	.35	10
	Mother only	2.3	.35	3	1.7	.00	1
	Father only	2.2	.37	4	2.4	.00	1
	Neither parent	2.8	.46	7	2.7	.44	7
Divorced families	Both parents	2.5	.28	5	2.5	.67	5
	Mother only	2.4	.40	5	2.3	.41	5
	Father only	2.4	.45	4	2.3	.01	2
	Neither parent	2.8	.39	4	2.8	.46	4

Table A3.2: Multivariate significance table. Offer Self-Image scores by number of 'optimal' parents

	F	d.f.	p
Mother	9.7	70,1	.003
Father × Mother	6.4	70,1	.014
Father	4.7	70,1	.033

Appendix 4:

Adolescent Maturity Indices: Group by Sex Means and Standard Deviations

Table A4.1: Boy-girl relationships

	Intact				Divorced			
	Boys		*Girls*		*Boys*		*Girls*	
	$\bar{x}$	sd	$\bar{x}$	sd	$\bar{x}$	sd	$\bar{x}$	sd
Intimacy	2.06	1.14	1.00	1.08	.77	1.15	1.62	1.71
Dating	3.06	.56	3.08	.28	3.00	.61	3.23	.73
Opp. sex rel.	2.77	.67	3.00	.00	3.00	.00	3.00	.00
Satisfaction	3.29	.77	3.62	.51	3.77	.44	3.46	.66
Pleasure	4.06	1.78	3.85	1.41	4.65	1.68	4.00	1.35

Table A4.2: Autonomous attitudes

	Intact				Divorced			
	Boys		*Girls*		*Boys*		*Girls*	
	$\bar{x}$	sd	$\bar{x}$	sd	$\bar{x}$	sd	$\bar{x}$	sd
Future self	4.81	1.03	5.05	1.03	4.53	1.26	4.20	1.27
Job competence	5.75	.75	5.68	.75	5.53	.77	5.40	.99
New situation	4.33	1.07	4.42	1.31	4.74	1.33	4.13	1.13
Avoid failure	4.71	1.10	5.21	.79	5.16	.90	5.00	.93
Decisive	4.81	.93	4.58	1.31	5.21	1.1	4.60	1.30

Table A4.3: Independent behaviour

	Intact				Divorced			
	Boys		*Girls*		*Boys*		*Girls*	
	$\bar{x}$	sd	$\bar{x}$	sd	$\bar{x}$	sd	$\bar{x}$	sd
Job	2.14	1.21	2.16	1.12	1.89	.94	2.53	1.68
Home activities	2.68	1.09	2.32	1.11	2.84	1.21	3.33	1.45
Family outings	3.27	.88	3.11	.74	3.53	.61	3.87	.74
Evenings out	1.05	1.56	1.42	1.12	1.58	1.71	2.07	2.02
Whereabouts	1.73	.63	1.45	2.00	1.58	.84	1.67	.82
Friends	1.73	.55	1.74	.65	1.68	.67	1.60	.63

Note: For the purpose of this analysis all scores have been keyed so that the higher the score the greater the maturity.

Appendix 5:

Questionnaires

A ADOLESCENTS' INTERVIEW

Introduction

(Interviewer introduces self)

As you know, this study is being carried out by the Institute of Family Studies to gain more understanding of teenagers' lives so that people may be able to provide better help and services for them. We are specially interested in people whose parents have been separated, but we're also interested in teenagers from all types of family background.

We want to get the teenagers' own views of their likes and dislikes, the plusses and minuses in their lives. I'm going to ask some questions — please feel free to say anything you want to say, and to add anything *you* think is important is the questions don't cover it.

What you say will be *strictly private*. No-one except the researchers will see this information. It will be identified only by a number and no full names will be included.

First we need to get some background information.

1.1 What is your first name? (remember, surnames are not needed).

1.2 How old are you?

(Questions 1.3–2.3 are not relevant to this report)

2.4 Tell me some of the things you like doing *best* when you're not at school . . .

2.5 Do you have some things you have to spend time doing that you're *not* so keen about? What are they?

2.6 [Tear out sheet overleaf and hand to teenager]
Here's a list of things some people of your age sometimes do. Could you tell me if you do any of these things *a lot*, *a fair amount*, *not much*, or *never* per week?

	Every Day	4–6 times per week	1–3 times per week	Never
1. Paid job outside home	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
2. Home-work	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
3. Household/garden tasks	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
4. Caring for pets	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
5. Clubs, societies, fellowship	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
6. Sport (taking part)	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
7. Extra school activities drama, Music, Ballet, Tennis (etc.) lessons	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
8. Watching T.V.	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
9. Have friends over	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
10. Go to friend's place	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
11. Read a book	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
12. Do things at home alone for pleasure	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
13. Go to movies	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
14. Do things at home with other family members	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
15. Spend time with friends in park on road, at corner shops etc.	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
16. Go to beach	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
17. Play the pinball machines	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
18. Visit relatives	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
19. Go to discos	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
20. Go out with family	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
21. Other (Specify)	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

2.7 How many evenings would you spend away from home during a week? [ ]

2.8 Do you have to be home by a certain time?
Yes [ ] No [ ]
If yes: What happens if you are not?

2.9 Do you parents know where you are when you go out?
Always [ ] Mostly [ ] Sometimes [ ] Usually not [ ]

2.10 Do you parents know most of your friends? Or do you like to keep your home life and friendships separate?
Do your parents know
All [ ] Go to 3.1 Most [ ] Few [ ] None [ ]

2.11 Could you explain why this is so?

3.1 How many close friends do you have?

3.2 Would you like to have more?

3.3 What sort of things do you do together?

(*Questions 4.1–4.10 are not relevant to this report*)

5.1 Have you got a boy/girl friend (opposite sex)?
Yes [ ] No [ ]

5.2 What are the best things about friendship?

5.3 Do you go out usually:
Alone together [ ] In a group [ ] Have never been out [ ]
Other (specify) [ ]

5.4 Have you had a girl/boy friend before?
Yes [ ] No [ ]
If no, to Q.5.1 and Q.5.4 Go to Q5.6

5.5 Do you mind telling me how close you got/get with your boy/girl friend?
[Hand card] Which box is the *closest* that you get together

Fun to be with as a companion	Hold hands and sometimes kiss	Cuddle and kiss quite a lot	Close intimacy but not full sex	Full sex

5.6 Do you think your relationship with boys/girls (opposite sex) is about the same as most kids of your age? Are you:
less advanced [ ] about the same [ ] more advanced [ ]

5.7 Are you happy about the way you get on with boys/girls (opposite sex)?
Yes [ ] No [ ] Don't know [ ]
[If Yes]

5.8 How would you like this to change?

5.9 Do you ever feel that people put pressure on you to have more sexual intimacy than you really want?
If Yes, please explain.

5.10 Do you have any worries about sex?

5.11 If Yes: What sort of worries?

6.1 Do you think you will want to get married some day?
Yes [ ] No [ ] Don't know [ ]

6.2 When do you think is the proper time to think of getting married?
Best age [ ] Steady job [ ] Want children [ ] Personally mature [ ]
Experience [ ] Don't know [ ] Other [ ]

(*Questions 6.3–7.2 are not relevant to this report*)

B ADOLESCENTS FROM SEPARATED FAMILIES ONLY

Now, I'd like to ask you a little about what happened when your parents separated.

8.1 When did you first begin to realise that things weren't going too well between your mother and father?

8.2 Did you expect that they might decide to separate, or did it come as quite a shock to you?
Could you tell me about it?

8.3 Did someone explain what was happening to you, and that the separation was going to take place?
Yes [ ] No [ ] [If 'Yes']

8.4 Who told you? How? When?

8.5 What do you think were the main reasons for the separation?

8.6 How did you feel when your parents *first separated*?

8.7 How do you feel *now*?

8.8 Now that they have separated do you think your parents get on
better [ ] about the same [ ] or do they disagree more [ ]

8.9 Why is this?

8.10 Here is a sheet with some of the ways that teenagers sometimes feel when their parents separate. Could you fell it in for me? You can add your own ideas where we have written 'other'.
Tick the box which shows whether you feel or felt any of these things *very strongly*, *fairly strongly*, *a little bit* or *not at all*.

	Very *strongly*	Fairly *strongly*	Little *bit*	Not at *all*
Sad	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Relieved	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Angry with one parent	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Angry with both parents	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Can't believe it	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Glad	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Wonder if I'm to blame	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Don't care	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Refused to accept it	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Shocked	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Upset at first, but now OK	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Still upset, but accept decision	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Want parents to re-unite	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Felt rejected	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Other	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Other	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

8.11 Is there anything else that you would like to add?

9.1 When there are real problems in one's life it's often helpful if one can talk about them to someone. Did you have any people you could talk to about your family problems?
Yes [ ] No [ ]
If No, Go to Q9.5

9.2 [If 'yes'] Who did you find was the best person (or people) to talk to?

Mother [ ]	Friend (boy) [ ]
Father [ ]	Friend (girl) [ ]
Grandparents [ ]	Friend (adult) [ ]
Brother [ ]	Minister/priest [ ]
Sister [ ]	Counsellor [ ]
Other/relative [ ]	Other [ ]
Other [ ]	

9.3 In what way was this person(s) helpful?

9.4 Did you feel the best person (or people) *really* understood and cared?

Very well	*fairly well*	*not very well*	*hardly at all*
[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

Go to Q.10.1

9.5 Would you have liked to be able to get help and support from someone? or are you the sort of person that prefers to handle troubles by yourself?

9.6 Can you suggest any ways in which people might be able to help teenagers better when they are going through family problems like these?

10.1 Now I'd like to talk about what the separation has meant in the way of *changes* in your life.
What would you say is the *biggest* change that has taken place?

10.2 How do you feel about this?

10.3 What other changes have there been?

10.4 Here is a list of changes that sometimes affect teenagers when their parents separate. Could you tell me if any of these changes have happened in your family.
(Record in Col.1)
Changes since Separation No.....

	Col.1	Col.2
1. Teenager no longer living at home.		
2. Teenager living with only 1 parent.		
3. Less tension/fighting in family		
4. Family happier than before separation.		
5. Family less happy than before separation.		
6. Moved house.		
7. Moved to new district.		
8. Family has less money.		
9. Mother now working.		
10. Teenager has more household tasks.		
11. Teenager now has part-time job.		
12. Can't keep old pets.		
13. Changed schools.		
14. Lost touch with old friends.		
15. Gained new friends.		
16. Brothers and sisters not all together.		
17. Home not as organised as it used to be.		
18. Spend more time away from home.		
19. Friends more important than before.		
20. New partner for mother.		
21. New partner for father.		
22. New kids in family.		
23. Other		

Comments
Which of these do you think are the most important as far as you are concerned?
Record in Col.2.

11.1 When parents decide to separate they often make arrangements about custody and access, that means who is going to be responsible for the children, where they are going to live and how often they see each parent. Do you know what arrangements have been made in your family about this?

11.2 Who do you usually live with?

11.3 Who are you living with at present?

11.4 Do you see both parents regularly? Comment

11.5 Are you free to come and go between your parents' homes as you like — or are there fairly fixed arrangements about this?
[If fixed, give details of frequency and duration]

11.6 Were you asked what you would prefer to happen about this?
Yes [ ] No [ ]

11.7 Are you happy about the arrangements as they have worked out?
Yes [ ] No [ ]
If NO ask:

11.8 If you could alter the arrangements how would you like them to be?
If child does not see other parent GO TO Q.11.15

11.9 Do you enjoy your visits to (other parent)?
Yes [ ] No [ ]

11.10 Would you like to tell me about them. . .?

11.11 When you're at Mum's place is it OK for you to telephone Dad?

11.12 What about when you're at Dad's place?

11.13 Do you sometimes have to visit Mum/Dad when you would rather not go?
No [ ] Yes, sometimes [ ] Yes, always [ ]
If Yes, ask Why is this?

11.14 Do you ever feel you might hurt one parent's feelings by saying that you want to spend more time with the other one?
No [ ] Yes [ ]

11.15 What about the problem of taking sides? Do you take sides with Mum or Dad?

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
Mum				
Dad				

11.16 Do you ever feel that either of them would like you to take sides?

	M	F		M	F
Yes	[ ]	[ ]	No	[ ]	[ ]

12.1 Do either Mum or Dad have a new partner?

	M	F		M	F
Yes	[ ]	[ ]	No	[ ]	[ ]

[If 'yes']

12.2 How do you get along with him/her?

12.3 What about kids . . . are there any new kids involved?
Yes [ ] No [ ]
[If 'yes']

12.4 How do you get along with them?

13.1 Do you think the separation has changed your relationship with your mother and/or your father in any ways?
Yes [ ] No [ ]

13.2 Could you explain in what ways . . . ?

13.3 Do you ever feel that you're expected to take the place of your other parent in the family? Could you explain . . . ?
How do you feel about this . . . ?

13.4 Do you think the separation has helped you to grow up quicker in any ways?
Yes [ ] No [ ]

13.5 In what ways?

13.6 Would you like your parent to get back together again?
Yes [ ] No [ ]

13.7 Do you think it's likely that they *will* get back together?
Yes [ ] No [ ]

13.8 On looking back do you think your parents' decision to separate was the right one for them?
Yes [ ] No [ ]

13.9 Overall, do you think things have been better, or worse in your family since the separation?
Don't know [ ] Better [ ] Worse [ ]

13.10 What has been the *worst* thing about it from your point of view?

13.11 And what has been the *best* thing about it for you?

13.12 If you knew a family who was about to separate, what advice would you give the parents on how to help their children?

13.13 What about the children, what advice would you give to them?

C ADOLESCENTS BOTH GROUPS

Now, let's have a bit of a break from talking. I'll get you to fill out this questionnaire so that we can get a picture of some of your attitudes and opinions.

N.S.Q
Langner 22. [See attached measured]
[Separated interview begins here]

The thing we're going to do is a Family Sculpture.

14.1 First of all who do you see as being the members of your family?

14.2 Here is a chess-board and here are some figures. This is your mother, your father and yourself (if you want to you can put in extra figures — here are some others).
(Note to interviewer, limit extras to one or two if possible).
Could you please arrange the figures on the board according to how close *you* feel to each one, and also how close *they* feel to one another. If you think two people feel very distant you might place one here (in one corner) and one way over here (opposite corner). If you think two people feel very close you an put them next to each other, and people can look at each other or away.
[Interviewer demonstrates]
Arrange the figures on the board, each in one square — and remember you have the whole board to use.
[Interviewer scores family sculpture, marking positions in scoring blank, noting number of squares between M & F & T, F & T and also direction of gaze of each figure.]
Could you explain the sculpture you have just made to me please?
[Note verbatim the S's account.]
Page for chess board

14.3 [Record Family Sculpture Explanation here]

I want to try to understand a bit more about how you see the relationships between the people in your family. Here's another game called 'Eggs in a Basket'.
Here are four baskets — one for you, one for your mother, one for your father and one for the rest of your family. Here are 12 china eggs which I'm going to put in your basket. Now I want you to show me how much of *yourself* you give to your mother, your father and the rest of the family — and how much you keep for yourself and your interests and friends *outside the family*. Take some of the eggs out of your basket and put them in the other baskets to show me how much of yourself you give and how much you keep.

14.4 [Interviewer record scores]
Mother [ ] Father [ ] Other [ ] Self [ ]
Now we're going to take the eggs out of the third basket. We'll ignore the other members of the family and you can add these extra eggs to the other baskets that are left to show how much of yourself you give to your mother and your father and how much you keep for yourself and your outside interests and friends.

14.5 Mother [ ] Father [ ] Self [ ]

14.6 Thinking about the family as a whole now, are there some people who seem to have special ties or/and share common interests?
Response to Q.14.6 is not relevant to this report

14.7 Now I want to talk about disagreements!
Most families have quarrels sometimes. Do the members of your family fight much? Would you say there is:
A lot [ ] A fair amount [ ] A medium amount [ ] Not much [ ]
fighting in your family?

Question 14.8 is not relevant to this report

14.9 Has your family always disagreed to about the same extent? or do you think there's been *more* or *less* fighting than there used to be?
more [ ] same [ ] GO TO Q.14.11 less [ ]

14.10 Why do you think that is?
[if not previously covered in Q.14.8. Ask.]

14.11 Do your mother and father sometimes have disagreements? (This refers to biological parents)
Yes [ ] No [ ] Don't know [ ]

14.12 Do you think they disagree
more [ ] about the same [ ] less [ ]
than most couples?
(Intact only)

14.13 Do you sometimes feel yourself getting involved in your parent's disagreements?
Yes [ ] No [ ]
What happens then?

Questions 15.1–15.3 are not relevant to this report

16.1 Do you and your mother understand each other well?

16.2 Do you find it easy to talk to her?

16.3 Would you ask her advice about problems?

16.4 Are there some things you couldn't talk to her about?

16.5 Do you wish you could talk more freely with her?

16.6 Does she ever talk about *her* problems with you?

16.7 Do you understand *her* point of view?

16.8 If you had to pick one of the following which would you say best describes how you feel about your mother?
A typical mum [1] More of a friend than a mother [2]
Almost a stranger [3]

16.9 Could you write a sentence describing your mother to me?
My mother . . .

16.10 Now let's talk about your father.
Do you and your father understand each other well?

16.11 Do you find it easy to talk to him ?

16.12 Would you ask his advice about problems?

16.13 Are there some things you couldn't talk to him about?
If Yes: Could you explain?

16.14 Do you wish you could talk to him more freely?

16.15 Does he ever talk about *his* problems with you?

16.16 Do you understand *his* point of view?

16.17 If you had to pick one of the following which would you say best describes how you feel about your father?
A typical dad [1] More of a friend than a father [2] Almost a stranger [3]

16.18 Could you write a sentence describing your father to me?
My father . . .

16.19 In general, do you think you get on with your parents

	Mother	Father
better	[ ]	[ ]
the same	[ ]	[ ]
worse	[ ]	[ ]

Than one year ago?

16.20 If worse) Could you explain why?
better)

16.21 Here are two sheets which state ways in which some parents behave towards their children. Could you please fill each one out. The first refers to your *mother* and the second refers to your *father*. [P.B.I.]

16.22 When you are a parent will you handle your children in much the same way as your parents handle you?

Exactly the same	Similar in most things	Different in most things	Different in everything that I can think of.

16.23 In what ways will it be the same or different?

16.24 Do you think there is one particular person in the family whom you see as the main *strength* of the family? (In the sense that he or she copes with most of the problems.)

16.25 Who is that?

16.26 On the whole do you think of your parents mostly as a *couple* or as two *individuals*?
couple [ ]
individual [ ]

17. Before we end I'd like to ask a few more questions about how you feel about life in general. What do you see as the main *problems* or *difficulties* you have to cope with at the moment?
Here is a list of problems that some teenagers have. Could you tell me if any of these are problems for you? Tell me if they are *A major worry, quite a problem, a little worrying* or *no problem*?

	A Major worry	Quite a problem	A Little worrying	No problem
The struggle for more independence from parents.	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Dissatisfaction with the way you're making out with the opposite sex	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

Your career — what you are going to do, or whether you will make the grade.	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Your appearance — perhaps your looks, shape, size, skin or hair.	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Uncertainty about what you believe in. What is right/wrong may not be so easy to be sure about.	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Worries about school-work.	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Worries about friends or other people important to you	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Worries about world problems: wars, racism, nuclear weapons, starvation in third world countries etc.	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

17.2 How do you feel you're coping with your life at present?
Very well [1] pretty well [2] not very well [3] badly [4]
Finally, I'd like to ask you two more questions.

17.3 In general, how satisfying do you find the way you are spending your life these days? Would you call it:
Completely satisfying [1] pretty satisfying [2] not very satisfying [3]

17.4 Taking all things together, how happy would you say your family is at present? Would you say it's:
very happy [1] pretty happy [2] or not too happy these days [3]

17.5 Are there any other things that we haven't talked about which *you* would like to bring up — things that you feel are important to teenagers, or that might help others to understand the problems that teenagers have and how they might be helped?

Time interview finished _____ a.m. _____ p.m.
Length of interview
Interviewer's name
Telephone number:
Were there any problems with the interview, or attitudes of the parents/adolescents which may have affected the answers given.
Were there any answers where there seemed to be
some doubt as to sincerity
a lack of understanding
evidence of incompleteness?
Where was the interview conducted?
Was there anything about the subjects, situation, home, neighbourhood, that seems important to the interpretation of the interview?

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D PARENTS' INTERVIEW

Introduction

(Interviewer introduces him/herself)

As you know, this study is being carried out the the Institute of Family Studies in order to gain more understanding about teenagers and how they adjust to the problems of growing up. We are especially interested in teenagers whose parents have separated, but we would also like to know how teenagers in other sorts of families feel about school, home and other aspects of their lives. This study is not just about problems. We would like to hear about both the sunlight and the shadows of growing up in an Australian family today.

To do this properly we need to find out about how the teenager views his/her own life, and also how his/her parents see things. Because it is so important to get a picture of his/her home life we shall ask you to tell us a little about yourself and about family relationships, and also about how you think your son/daughter is getting on at school and with his/her friends, and in other activities beyond the home.

What you tell us will be *strictly confidential*. Only researchers associated with the study will see the information, and it will be identified only by a number. No surnames will be includes with this information.

Interview commenced _____ a.m. _____ p.m.

First of all I'd like to ask a few questions about your family.

1.1 What is your Christian name?
(ex) Husband _____ Wife _____

1.2 Would you mind telling me your approximate age
Husband _____ Wife _____

1.2.1 Could you tell me in what country you were born?

1.2.2 How long have you been in Australia?

1.3 What is the name of your adolescent involved in this study?

1.4 Are you currently married, separated or divorced?
Married [1] Separated [2] Divorced [3] Other (specify) [4]

1.5 How long have you been married, or together, for?

1.6 What is the name, age and sex of each child that belongs to your family? Please start with the oldest.
Record in cols. 1, 2 and 3 below.

1.7 Which of these children still live in this household?
(Tick col.4 below) (If Teen has left home, get details)

	Col.1 Name	Col.2 Age	Col.3 Sex M.	Col.3 Sex F.	Col.4 Living in household Yes	Col.4 Living in household No
1st Child						
2nd „						

3rd „
4th „
5th „
6th „
7th „
8th „

1.8 Do any other people live in the house with you?
Yes [1] No [2]

1.9 If yes, who are they?
New partner [1] Lodger [2] Friend(s) [3] Relative [4]
Other (specify) [5]

1.10 Could you tell me how long you and your family have lived in your present home/flat?
Less than 6 months [1] 6 months–1 year [2] 1–4 years (specify [3]
Go to Q.1.14 5–9 years (specify) [4] 10 years or more [5]

1.11 How often have you and your family moved in the last 5 years?
Have you moved:
Once [1] Twice [2] Three times or more, or [3] Go to Q.1.14
Have not moved in the last 5 years [4]

1.12 Were the moves:
In the same neighbourhood [1] In another neighbourhood of Sydney [2]
Interstate [3] Outside Australia? [4]

1.13 Did the moves involve a change of schools for the children?
Yes [ ] No [ ]

1.14 At present are you:

		Self	(ex)Partner
(Answer for ex-partner if known Q.1.14–1.17	Working full-time		
	Working part-time		
	Unemployed		
	Disabled		
	Home duties		
	Student		
Go to Q. 1.16	Retired		
	Other		

1.15 What kind of work do you do?
Self (Ex)Partner
Go to Q.1.18

1.16 What work did you do in your last job?
Self (Ex)Partner

1.17 What work are you trained to do?
Self (Ex)Partner

1.18 In this survey of families all over Sydney, we are trying to get a clear picture of people's financial situations. Including all sources of income, what was your total income before taxes in the last year? Just give me a number on the

sheet. Please count all income, wages, salary, overtime, child endowment, pensions, gifts, superannuation, tips, interest, maintenance, scholarships. [Tear out sheet overleaf and hand to interviewee]. Do not deduct tax, superannuation contributions etc. (Record in Col.1)

	(Q.1.18) Col.1	(Q.1.19) Col.2	(Q.1.21) Col.3
1. No income			
2. Less than $2000 year ($29 wk.)			
3. $2000-$5000 year ($39-96 wk.)			
4. $5000-$7000 year ($96-$135 wk.)			
5. $7000-$9000 year ($135-$173 wk.)			
6. $9000-$12000 year ($173-$231 wk.)			
7. $12000-$15000 year ($231-$288 wk.)			
8. $15000-$18000 year ($288-$346 wk.)			
9. $18000-$21000 year ($346-$404 wk.)			
10. $21000-$24000 year ($404-$464 wk.)			
11. Over $24000 year ($462 wk.)			

1.19 How much of this total did you (child's mother) earn in 1981? Just give me a number on the sheet. (In col.2)

1.20 How many people depend on this income, including your children
Number of people [ ]

1.21 Has your total income changed markedly since separation?
Yes [ ] No [ ]
(If yes, indicate in col.3 of Q.1.18 total income for 1980)

1.21.1 How much maintenance did or do you receive per week?

1.22 What is the highest grade or year that you finished and got credit for at school and afterwards?
(Answer for both if known)

	(Ex)Husband	Wife
No formal school	1	1
Primary school	2	2
Some high-school	3	3
School Certificate/Intermediate (or equivalent	4	4
Higher School Certificate/ Leaving Cert (or equivalent)	5	5
Completed apprenticeship, nursing training, etc Specify:	6	6
College, university	7	7

Custodial parent only: Q1.23–1.24

1.23 Could you tell me, now, a little more about your present living arrangements. Do you:

	Q.1 Col.1	Q.2 Col.2
Pay rent	1	
Share rent	2	
Have Housing Commission home	3	
Pay mortgage		

Go to Q.1.25 Own home
Other

1.24 Could you say roughly how much you pay per week/year for accommodation?
(Record in Col.2)

1.25 Now I'd like to ask you both about the family's religious beliefs.
Do you belong to a religious denomination?
Yes [1] No [2]
If yes, which one?

1.26 Are you an active member of this church?
Do you attend church regularly?
Yes [1] No [2]

1.27 Has (child) been brought up with a religious background of any kind?
Yes [1] No [2]

1.28 Is this important to you?
Yes [1] No [2]

1.29 How often does (child) go to church/fellowship?

2.1 Now I'd like to get a picture of the family's general state of health.
First, yourself
How would you describe your present health?

		Mother	Father
	excellent	1	1
(self only 2.1-2.5)	good	2	2
	fair	3	3
	poor	4	4

2.2 Has it changed in the last 12 months?

	Mother	Father
yes — better	1	1
yes — much worse	2	2
yes — a bit worse	3	3
No — same	4	4
Other	5	5

2.3 Have you seen a doctor or other practitioner within the last 12 months for any of these conditions. (Tick in Col.1)

	Mother		Father	
	Col.1	Col.2	Col.1	Col.2
Gynaecological/medical problems				
Surgical problems				
Nervous problems				

If no problems, GO TO Q.2.6

2.4 How severe were they? (Record 'm' for mod. 's' for severe in col.2)
Could you explain briefly about this.

2.5 Did these problems necessitate being admitted to hospital?

	Yes	No		Yes	No
Mother	[1]	[2]	Father	[1]	[2]

2.6 Is there any family member whose health gives you serious cause for worry?
Yes [1] No [2]

2.7 Could you say briefly what the trouble is?

2.8 Could we talk about (child's) health now?

2.9 Would you say his present is health is:
(Go to Q.3.0) excellent [1] good [2] fair [3] poor [4]

2.10 Could you tell me what (child's) main health problems are?

2.11 Does (child) have any problems with:

	Q.2.11 Col.1 Yes	Col.2 No	Q.2.12 Col.3 Time
poor sleeping	1	2	
Over eating	1	2	
Under eating	1	2	
Nervous stomach	1	2	
Headaches	1	2	
Asthma	1	2	

2.12 For how long has it been like this? (Record in Q.2.11, Col.3)

2.13 Has anything changed in the last 12 months?
Yes — better [1] Yes — much worse [2] Yes — a bit worse [3]
No the same [4] Other (Specify) [5]

2.14 What do you think is the reason for this?

Questions 3–11.3 are not relevant to this report

11.4 Here is a check list of characteristics that teenagers may have.
Would you please state how well each statement applies to Child as he is now (Tear off and hand to parents)

	Exactly like	Fairly like	A little like	Not at all like
1. Has a go at doing difficult things by himself				
2. Is rude to mother and/or father				
3. Makes a big fuss when extra jobs need to be done				
4. Is understanding of parents' worries and problems				
5. Can't concentrate for long				
6. Wants his parents to make up his mind for him				
7. Can be relied on to do what he says he will do				
8. Wants constant entertainment and/or excitement				
9. Is sulky if unable to have his own way				
10. Cares about other people's feelings				

11. Lacks enterprise and initiative in planning his own activities
12. Accepts life in a realistic way
13. Cannot be trusted to behave responsibly
14. Prefers to spend time with his friends rather than his family
15. Handles most of his problems by himself
16. Is a good judge of other people
17. Has the courage to stand up for his own ideas
18. Finds it very hard to make decisions
19 Is easily led by others
20. Sees what needs to be done and does it without being told
21. Acts before thinking, is impulsive

Questions 11.5–14.2 are not relevant to this report

How do adolescents fare when parents divorce? How can parents and teachers help? This book examines the stereotype of the 'maladjusted teenager from the broken home' and finds it unfair and misleading. Comparing adolescents from currently divorcing families with those from intact families, the authors find no differences in adjustment. High family conflict and poor parent–child relationships are linked to poor adjustment in *both* family groups. Parents who respect and understand adolescents' needs for love, autonomy and explanation, and who do not embroil them in their own conflicts, can help them through the pain of divorce. Rejected or stifled adolescents do poorly whether parents are together or apart.

The book provides both quantitative results based on standard measures and qualitative data from adolescents' own accounts: it concludes with suggestions for parents and policy-makers. *Don't Feel The World Is Caving In* should prove a valued resource for all those concerned with children in divorce, including adolescents themselves.

An Australian Institute of Family Studies Research Project

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